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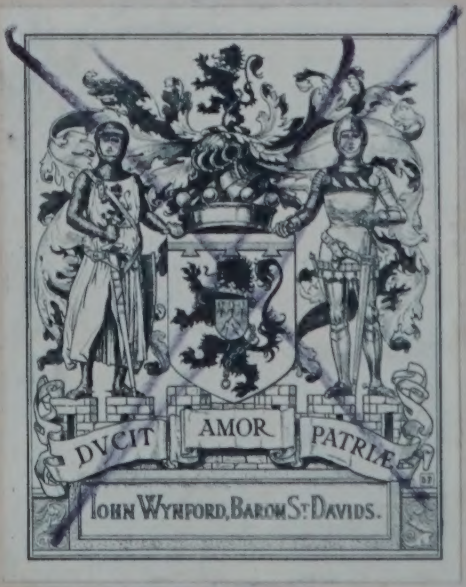

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BY

HAMILTON DRUMMOND

AUTHOR OF

"SIR GALAHAD OF THE ARMY," "THE THREE ENVELOPES," "THE JUSTICE OF THE KING," "SHOES OF GOLD," ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	My Father and I	7
II.	How he Schooled me	14
III.	The Charge that was laid upon me	21
IV.	Ebb Tide and the Winds of God	30
V.	Sorrow and Sunshine	38
VI.	Dave hears the Truth and is Angry	47
VII.	Dunquester Takes a Hand	56
VIII.	My Lord Signs-on under Captain Joan	68
IX.	What does Hull know of John Sharland?	78
X.	The *Elizabeth Regina*	89
XI.	An Embargo that Failed	98
XII.	I Grow Afraid	107
XIII.	Fog's my Friend	115
XIV.	Straws in the Wind	121
XV.	Captain Scotton Speaks his Mind	130
XVI.	A Prop Breaks under us	138
XVII.	We Arrive	148
XVIII.	The Dinghy	158
XIX.	What Happened Ashore	167
XX.	Blair Shows his Hand	178
XXI.	The Winds are Strong	188
XXII.	We are Driven South	198
XXIII.	Ezra Plowden Smells Ice	207
XXIV.	The Berg with a Grey Patch	215
XXV.	The Galleon	224
XXVI.	Till the Sea Gives up its Dead	234

CHAP. PAGE

XXVII. Dave and I are at Odds 243
XXVIII. The Sibble Wards 252
XXIX. The Jollity 260
XXX. Mutiny 269
XXXI. We Quit the Ship 278
XXXII. Through the Dark of the Night . 287
XXXIII. How the *Regina* was Re-taken . . 297
XXXIV. With the Winds of God for Paradise 310

WINDS OF GOD

CHAPTER I

MY FATHER AND I

As this is largely the story of a woman, and what life-story is not? it is in part told by herself; but since there were at times happenings which she had no direct knowledge of, it in part tells its own tale. Those who read will find no difficulty in distinguishing the one from the other. At first it is the woman who speaks.

It is quite true, as some have told me, that the beginning of this story goes back to the days before I was born, but I do not think there is any need to begin further back than the year my father died. My mother had been drowned in the bay when I was three years old, since then we had always lived alone in the farm house on the slope of the hill overlooking the water, he and I.

It was curious, his blent love and hate of the sea. He never spoke of his boyhood's days, or of the first half of his life, but it was clear that if the sea had not been his nursing-mother it had housed and fed him through his best years. For that he loved it; then it took my mother from him, and his hatred grew to a passion, but always with the old love behind the hate. I suppose the truth was that the cords which had bound him for so many years never ceased to tug.

Though, as I have said, the story begins with my

father's death, I must tell a little of his life because of the influence it had upon me, and also of the strange training he gave. I never knew him except as a farmer, and our farm of eighty acres he worked mostly without help. On rare occasions, when the harvest was late and the weather threatened, he would hire a sickleman or two for a few days; but he always grudged it, and later, as I grew tall and strong, there was no need for such expense.

And it was an expense we could ill afford. A comfortable living was the most the farm gave us. On the wind-swept pastures, bleak until late on in Spring, only the hardiest of sheep throve, cattle not at all, and crops were scanty and ill to save. A farm further inland would have been more profitable, but I think that at first my father could not bear to be out of sight of the sea, and later the memory of my mother held him. Here they had lived, here he had known the happiest years of his life and just where the eye caught the water beyond the rolling curve of the slope she had died.

That would have given many men a distaste for the place, but not my father. Time and again I have seen him pause in ploughing and listen when the north-east wind brought up the sea voices from the bay. Baring his head his lips would move as if he answered back, then he would push on with his labour again. Once, after the parson had preached from the text "And the sea gave up the dead which was in it," he passed the evening until moonrise upon the edge of the slope—waiting. For what? I often wondered, and always believed that he both saw and heard more than I did. Surely great love has a vision all its own?

But if we could ill afford the cost of extra labour at harvest there were times when the farm left a small profit after the rent was paid. This was care-

fully hid away in a secret place known only to my father and myself, nor for any necessity was the hoard ever broken upon. "Your need will be greater," was all he would say. Even when, after a cruelly wet summer, the rot swept away half the sheep he refused to make up the flock.

"We can pinch a bit, we two," he said. "You will need it all and more before you are done, Joan lass."

That perplexed me, for not once but many times he declared his mind was free from all anxiety about me. I would have the farm after him: Lord Dunquester promised him that, and I could make the land pay with the best of them. That is where the contradiction came in. If I could make the land pay, and it was quite true that I could, why starve the farm which was to be mine? and why cry that I would have need of all he could stint out of it, and more? Either way it would come to me. Not that I gave thought to that except for the contradiction. Nor did I ask questions. I do not think my lord himself would have questioned John Sharland, close friends though the two were, and what my lord durst not do in or about Whitcroft no man dared, for he owned it all—stick, stone, and herring boat.

Where the hoard had lain at the first I never knew, but there came a day when knowledge brought me much discomfort and the cost of many sleepless nights. Our house, square-shaped, stone-built, low-roofed, faced the sea nearly a mile distant. The door, protected by the porch of strong lattice work, was in the middle; within it a passage ran two-thirds of the depth of the house. Off this, to the right, was the parlour, a room given over to silence and much dusting. As a child its solemn quietness had always awed me and I never grew to love it as I loved every

other nook and stone in the old house. To laugh in it seemed sacrilege.

Opposite was the room my mother had used both for her sewing and as a still-room. Round its walls were deep cupboards for the sweet-stuffs, cordials, pickles, condiments, dear to the housewife's heart. The making of these I loved as she had loved, but not the sewing. Nothing but sheer necessity ever drove me to my needle. For that I was not altogether to blame. Needs must that I learn cooking and the filling of a stores-closet, since without these there is no comfort in life, but my father with a purpose in his mind which I knew nothing of, kept me, except for these things, out-doors deepening lungs and strengthening limbs and muscle, when most maids would have been busy with their samplers. I could sew a button, mend a rent or darn a stocking, but there my knowledge ended. Nor have I ever found myself the worse for my ignorance.

My father loved this room as he loved whatsoever brought my mother's memory near to him. Here we sat through the long winter's evenings or in summer when the weather was too rough for out-o'-doors. Often no lamp was lit, but my father lay back in his deep leather-covered chair, smoking, while I fingered the keys of my mother's harpsichord, picking out old songs he had taught me. It was a small instrument of only four octaves, but it sufficed for his knowledge and mine. At times, at his bidding, I would sing the words, Mr Herrick's "Cherry Ripe," Ben Jonson's "Drink to me only with thine eyes," Sir John Suckling's, "Why so Pale?" or such like, but always diffidently; for though my voice was full and clear, so that even my lord spoke well of it, it was altogether untrained; or it might be that we talked, or rather that I listened while my father talked of books,

of cities, of strange lands, and the strange sights in them, but never once at these times did he mention himself; it was always as if he spoke from hearsay. That—to hear him talk—I loved best of all, and next to hear him read from the plays of Mr. Shakespeare, bringing out by interpretation of his voice the meanings and the beauty my ignorance would have passed by unseeing. At the time I did not see it, but now I know he had a clear purpose—to quicken my preception and store my mind out of his own experience of life.

Off the still-room was the kitchen, with a door into the end of the passage as well as out to the yard behind. It was warmly flagged, with a huge open hearth beyond the passage door. In the broad oak beams of the ceiling iron hooks were inserted according to custom. From these hung our winter's curing of hams and bacon, and the autumn harvest of herbs and pot-herbs—sage, marjoram, mint, thyme, tansy, with long twists of onions and bunches of lavender to ease their heaviness. Here we ate, unless a neighbour or the parson took a meal with us. Then the table was laid in the still-room, nor, humble farming folk though we were, could my lord himself have taken offence at our napery, so white and fine was it.

Opposite the kitchen a door opened into a byre or stable, with an entrance at the corner which gave upon the yard.

On the floor above there were likewise four rooms; my father's sleeping chamber over the parlour, mine across the central passage with a guest-room behind it. The fourth was unfurnished. In none of these rooms were the walls smooth-plastered as on the floor below, but the great stones were left exposed. Much use had polished these to about the height of

a man's shoulder while all beyond were almost as dull in the grain as the ancient builder had left them.

Ever since I was ten I had known of our hoard, but it was on my fourteenth birthday that I saw it for the first time. Hearing a loud knocking in my room I ran upstairs to find the bed pushed aside and my father busy with hammer and chisel cutting the mortar from round a great stone hidden by the bed-head. The floor was all strewn with the dust and chips. These he bade me gather up, take to the kitchen and knead thickly into a strip of stiff dough, first grinding the chips to powder, then return. Curiosity spurred my fingers, yet by the time I was ready there was a hole in the wall a foot deep and the great stone lay on the floor with its inner end clipt off. Beside it, opened-mouthed, stood a narrow bag of soft leather. Lifting this, my father poured the contents on the flat of my bed—guineas, double guineas, carolusus, with here and there a worn jacobus.

"Oh, father!" I cried and gasped. Never had I seen so much money, hardly had I ever imagined so much. Stooping, he ran his fingers through the heap, making it chink and glitter.

"Does it seem a deal?" he said. "It had need to! It's all there is to show for fourteen years of a man's life and labour. I began it the day you were born, until then there was no need, and what is it all!" he caught up two great handfuls, leaving, it might be, as much more on the bed. "Why! an ape could almost gather it all. But more than wheat can grow its sixty and eighty fold, and this will do better than that."

Many a time afterwards I wondered what he meant, but, as I have said, my father was an ill man to question. Dear, and all and all, though we were to each other, I durst not ask.

Neither durst I ask how much was in the bag, and he told me nothing. "Too little, too little," he murmured to himself as he scooped the coins slowly into the bag with his hollowed fingertips, "God grant it be enough when the time comes."

When all were in he lifted the bag, weighing it on his palm; then, shaking his head like one who says Nay to his own question, and is not pleased at the answer, he set it down and tied the mouth with a thong of leather. Turning, he thrust the bag into the hollow of the wall.

"There, Joan lass," and if it were not that I never saw my father weep I would have sworn there were tears in his eyes, "if the seed's not sown, at least some of it is in the barn," nor, again, durst I ask him what he meant.

Replacing the stone he filled in the space round it from my strip of dough, plastering it into position so cunningly that no casual glance could have detected the false mortar. But to make assurance certain he gathered yet more of the powdered rubbish and smeared it into the joint, having first mixed it with a little grime from the chimney to counterfeit age. Stepping back he nodded satisfaction.

"There, Joan, my girl! There's none to spy since none comes here but thee and me; and if they did come I think they'd find little." His eyes lit on me and his voice changed. "Chut! chut! Not afraid, are you?" But I was—mortal afraid at the thought of thieves and what I might hear at the dead of night. "We must change that. To-morrow we shall begin."

CHAPTER II

HOW HE SCHOOLED ME

AND on the morrow we began, though at first fear grew yet more afraid. It was like clothing imagination with life. Where they had been hidden I do not know, for in all my fourteen years I had never seen them, but my father produced a pair of great pistols. Taking one of them—we were in the still-room, with the curtains drawn and the lamp lit—he bade me stand at his knee while he went over its every part, from the point of the muzzle to the blunt tip of the butt. With the patience of a teacher learning a dull child her A B C, he explained its use and mechanism.

"'Tis the same with every tool," he said. "Learn to know it as you do your finger-tips, and it will obey you as they do. It is not enough to shoot straight—"

"Shoot!" I cried. "Me shoot?"

"Please God, not in anger," he answered, "though if the need comes it is well the knowledge should come before it. Learn to shoot you must."

Then he fell back on his patient teaching—this for this use, that for that, the trigger, the hammer, the flash-pan, the flint, each working into each as bone works into bone and muscle plays upon muscle, until the interest of the cleverness caught me and the dull child was no longer dull, but learned her lesson

greedily. Interest in the task is the true, unfailing, and simple key to understanding.

After the use and mechanism came the grip—how to hold the butt firmly but without strain, lightly but without slackness, and as the interest and knowledge quickened fear departed. Knowledge, as well as love, can cast out fear; it lays the bogie-terrors of the dark. Then followed the aim and the stance, after that the swing—how to shift rapidly from side to side, stop dead at a sudden point in the curve and yet not spill the priming; all these without firing a shot.

Loading also he taught me, measuring the powder many times with a nice exactness until the experienced eye could guess the charge in the palm of the hand almost to a grain. After that, speed—till my readier fingers out-flew his, stiffened with age and labour, and the master admitted that there, at least, the pupil surpassed him. Then he showed me so many tricks learned in I know not what bitter school, that I marvelled what manner of life my sober, farming father had lived in his younger days, but durst not ask him.

How many nights were so spent before I first smelt powder I have forgotten, but they ran into weeks, and use had so grown into custom that the practising out-o'-doors which followed never troubled me. Once the recoil was understood I shot straight, or what would have passed for straight with any man but my father. Nothing contented him short of accuracy, and in time such accuracy came that I could have killed a sparrow on a twig twenty paces off, provided I knew my pistol.

Here my father, who was thorough in all things, and, as I now know, had the future possible need always clear in his mind, showed himself very wise.

From Cleveland, from Whitcroft, from other places whose names I have forgotten, one here, one there, not to rouse talk, he bought pistols of differing weights and makes, of different ages, too; there was even a clumsy dag among them. These I used, now this, now that, until all came readily to my hand, and the change of weight or pattern never troubled me.

When I say he sought to avoid gossip I do not mean that none was raised. That a maid of fourteen —or any other age—should be so schooled set tongues clacking. But most agreed that my father, whose health even then was failing, was minded to leave me with a reputation which should keep The Scaur—as the farm was called, though without reason—free from molestation. And at that he left it, without agreeing or dissenting.

Nor did my lord himself come nearer to his purpose. Whether because the gossip reached him, as no doubt it did, or that he heard the shots and was drawn by a natural curiosity, I cannot say. But as we practised in the haggard with five or six pistols laid to my hand ready-loaded, the mark a great nail driven into a board reared up against a stack, he came behind us, we unknowing. It was snap-shot firing, and my father stood by, watch in hand, timing me. The whole, priming and all, took but forty seconds, yet twice the nail rang, and what missed it could have been covered by a crown piece.

It was then my lord spoke. What he would have said I do not know—some harmless jest at my expense, most likely—but the sight of my father's set, hard face checked him. My lord was always more than my lord; he was a fine-hearted gentleman, and recognised that an unwelcome freedom to an inferior in station might be an insolence. It is true they were friends in a sense, but the difference in

rank remained. Now he turned the jest against himself.

"Sharland, you must take me in hand, as you did when I was a lad. I doubt if I could do more than hit the haystack! Mistress Joan,"—he knew the names of all upon his estate, and passed an hour at The Scaur from time to time—"when the Stuarts come marching south, may you and I fight on the same side!" Then, picking up the pistols one by one, he fell to talking them over with my father, while I stood by, feeling very coltish and ungainly because of my long limbs. Presently he turned to me:

"To hit a mark like that, as you have hit it, is good so far as it goes and very good. But is the nerve steady? I will show you a better test." Strolling leisurely onwards he set his back to the board, took off his hat and held it level with his breast but not at arm's length—half cock, as it were, with the elbow to his ribs. "Now, put your bullet through that, Mistress Joan."

"No," I stammered, "No, no; I would never dare—"

"Aye, that's it; but you must learn to dare, am I not right, Sharland?"

My father laughed, sourly, I thought.

"I fear she must, my lord; but she'll spoil your gear, though you may not think it."

I had turned to him that he might cry off for me, but a glance at his face told me to expect no help from him.

When two folk live their lives together with either great love or hate between them to quicken their comprehension there's not a gesture, not a look, not a lift of the brows but is as instructive as speech—at times more so. It was so now. Not only would he

have me do this thing, but he would have me carry it off as a pupil of John Sharland's should, and not like a gawk-limbed slip of an awkward girl. There it was in his eyes plainer than words. It was only a glance, for on the instant he caught up one of the pistols I had already fired and fell to loading as if there was no more question. I saw it was the one I had first learned from and that steadied me. He meant that I should shoot, but he also meant to make it easy for me. I ceased to be afraid; a kind of puckish humour even seized upon me.

Taking the pistol I examined the priming carefully. My father had always taught me to trust no man's loading except needs must, and a grim smile lit his eyes as, dumbly, I spoke my lesson, not trusting even him. Levelling the barrel I took aim but paused.

"A little up, my lord—nay, that is too much, down an inch or two; now a turn to the right, but that again is too much; to the left, just the smallest—"

"Damn!" said my lord, "Shoot, and have done," and as the words left his mouth I shot. The hat twirled round, flew sidelong up in the air, hit against the stack and dropped, while my lord stood shaking his fingers as if he were not sure how much of them were left.

"Mischief take the wench!" he cried. "She first breaks my nerve with her do this—do that, the black muzzle all the time wavering over me from wrist to breast, then she shoots my steel buckle to pieces just where my nails tipped it." But having blown off his wrath he laughed, "Mistress Joan, you may thank your stars your father and I are good friends or I would have you burned for a witch."

Later, my father rated me for my impertinence, but even though he rated I think the trick pleased him; now, as I go back upon it, I am a little ashamed.

At that time my lord was in the early thirties. In the country he wore no wig but tied his hair back with a knot of ribbon, a fashion which set off his handsome, frank face to admiration. Tall beyond common, broad-shouldered, a fine buirdly figure of a man, it was little less than a sin that a callow, half-grown girl should make a jest of him; but he forgave it and her.

But my father was not content with such schooling as I have tried to explain—he must needs teach me the handling of a cutlass. By that time I was past fifteen, almost a woman grown in height, with muscles not alone rounded but tough-fibred from the labour on the farm. Of this tutilage there is less to be said, but again I learned many tricks which only a long apprenticeship could have taught the teacher. And I learned quickly. Why not? To me it was a play. I loved the quick motion as the healthy young of every animal loves activity. At times it was mere swash-buckling and there, strong though I was, my father easily drove me down; but at times there was play of fence and there I held my own because of suppler joints and a more nimble eye. To meet force with art was my cue and as my wrist steeled—I know no other name for it—skill of fence held even swash-buckling strength in check.

And as my father's wisdom—how wise he was I little guessed at the time, but commonly youth never recognises the wisdom of its elders till they are gone; as my father's wisdom, I say, had kept me from the rut of single-pistol knowledge, so now it trained me to the use of the cutlass both indoors and out. Nay, many a time we played our bout in the great empty upper chamber above the byre, with a lantern set now in one corner, now in another, that the deceiving shift of shadow might be understood and allowed for.

Nor, though it was play to me was it all play. The blunted cutlass, or the single-stick that we used by turns, could strike home heavily, and my father's intent face, the brows lowering above the narrowed eyes, the grey-bearded jaw squarely set, was grimly in earnest.

Then came a day when he dropped his point, gasping, and leaning against the wall caught at his breast with his left hand.

"I can teach you no more, Joan girl. God grant all this may be waste. God grant His winds blow softly; but if not—I have done the best I could for you, my lass. Remember that."

He had seldom said as much, and I might have asked him what he meant, but the sight of the grey face and tired eyes stayed me. All at once he seemed to have grown an old, old man.

CHAPTER III

THE CHARGE THAT WAS LAID UPON ME

I WAS eighteen when my father died. From the day upon which he, in a manner, laid aside his sword—as I have related—he failed rapidly, and during the last year of his life I worked the farm with hired help, aided at times by my lord and another friend, if it be not presumptuous to call my lord a friend.

And why should I not? After all, friends are those who show themselves friendly in the times of our needs and sorrows, forgiving offences, failures and follies for love's sake, blood or station has little to say to it. Blood? I have seen blood so hard to its blood that I marvelled if the professed love of God were there at all! These were not mine. Friends of my blood I had none since kith or kin had I none that I knew of. Nor because of jealousies, could my lord show himself over-friendly by coming too openly to my help; to have set his estate by the ears for the sake of John and Joan Sharland would have been a folly. But in times of pressure he sent a man to my aid, and with that and the other help I have spoken of, I won through.

To me it was a hard year, with the heavy daily labour its least trouble. But it was the year of the '15 rising; for those who can remember it I need say no more, while for those who cannot—well, let them praise God for their ignorance. It was not a great

war, and I shall say no more of it than this—even a petty war within our borders can turn the nation's heart to gall for bitterness.

No; anxious though the year was with its pinch and turmoil, my true sorrow lay in that my father slipped from me daily. Little by little, but with a dreadful progression that never stayed, this or that of his accustomed life was given up, his labour, his interest in the sheep, his walks abroad. Finally he could do no more than creep to the brow of the slope whence he might overlook the bay where the sea had taken my mother to its keeping. And there—it was springtime—he would sit for hours with a heavy cloak about him, gazing down with fierce, tired eyes at the water, always shifting, always changing, yet through every change, always the same. It is strange how fierce the tired eyes of the old seem at times, even when they are gentler, kindlier, more loving in spirit than in the days of their youth; so was it with my father.

Then the day came when only by my help could he rise to his feet at all. For a moment we stood together, my arm laid about him, his hand upon my shoulder across my neck, his gaze turned down the slope, fixed and steadfast, and his eyes filled. "And the sea gave up its dead," I heard him whisper. "By the Grace of God, Mary, it will not be long now."

That was in May and he never left the house again, though for awhile he sat daily in the porch, sunning himself.

It was early June when he took to his bed. The surgeon from Whitcroft had said nought could be done; he would just fade out. And so it was, slowly and yet unceasingly as the grass withereth. But his mind was always clear, and he watched himself as a man might watch a flame grow less and less by such

steady degrees that the moment of its flickering out was foreknown to him. Why he waited so long before he spoke what had filled his thoughts for eighteen years, I cannot guess. Most likely he had so arranged it in his mind, and what my father proposed to do, that he did.

It was at the slow fall of the dusk that he bade me sit beside him and listen, my hand in his, my shoulder against his pillow-end, as we so often sat now that he kept his bed, though mostly silent.

"A good girl," he said at last, speaking as if to himself. "No better could be; a daughter in love, a woman in tenderness and forbearance, and with more than a woman's silence. There was much you wanted to know, but I think partly you were afraid to ask, but not altogether afraid and not always. Why did I starve the farm to feed the hoard? Why did I teach you what is held to be a man's teaching and what few men are taught as you were? But you asked nothing; you did not understand, but you trusted, as, in part, you will have still to trust. Thank you, Joan girl, for the trust. It is a great love and a wise love that believes the best, and mostly it is justified, no matter what the gloss of doubt or difficulty may be. That which is worth loving is worth trusting even through a doubt. Not even the winds of the devil are as rank with poison as we sometimes think."

Though so weak his voice was clear and he spoke without a break. And there was no need for effort, my ear lay so ready to his mouth that not a whisper could have passed unheard. At times his fingers closed on mine with a meaning I understood, so that my eyes filled and my mouth fell trembling as his tenderness and comprehension came home to me.

"And these two are one," he went on, after a

pause, for thought, I think, rather than rest: "the hoarding and the schooling. But where to begin? Joan, girl, your fortune is not here at The Scaur. In time to come you'll think shame of The Scaur—no, not that: thank God you are not of the little breed that grows ashamed of the honest toil that fed them and made them what they are. But there are greater days before you than The Scaur can give, if only you can win through." He shifted uneasily on the pillow, and though I made no move I knew he had turned, facing me, for his voice was louder, fuller, almost with the old note of that domination which was his by nature as he went on, "And you will, you must, after all these years of waiting, you must: do you hear me, my girl?" And I answered, still without turning.

"Yes, but I do not understand."

"No, not yet," he said, shifting back to the old position of rest, and easing the strain from his voice. "But you will soon. It is an old story, a story many have dreamed of and many have lied about, but this is neither dream nor lie. Trust me in that, Joan, my lass. Ingots of gold, ingots of silver; cups, platters, dishes, some gold, some silver—mostly silver; gems cut and uncut, diamonds, rubies—a great treasure, a very great treasure."

Again he paused, this time, I think, because the beating of his heart choked his breathing. It was as if he saw whereof he spoke and gasped at the vision as I had gasped when the hoard was poured upon the bed. But it did not stir me at all. Even when he whispered, "All yours, Joan girl, all for you," it did not stir me at all. I saw nothing of what dazzled him, and was conscious of nothing but of the feeble hold of his fingers and the sorrowful weakness of his voice. It was not that I doubted, but it had no

reality, nothing was real but the faint clutch and the quiet, clear whisper.

"All for you," he repeated when his breath came again. "That is why we have pinched, we two, and that is why I have schooled you like a boy rather than a girl. But though we pinched till we almost starved at times there's not enough saved, not near enough. There's a long way to go, a very long way, and you'll have need of friends—David Catlett will be one, I think."

David Catlett! This time it was my fingers that twitched, perhaps because my heart gave a leap. Dave Catlett's name was the last thing I looked for, and the changed tone after the pause gave its use a significance that set my blood racing. Though my face was turned away I was glad of the growing dusk. Dave is that other friend I have spoken of, who came to my help when labour failed. I had thought it had ended there; no, that is not true, I hoped it had not ended there, but hoped with that hope which a maid shuts up in her heart and dares not whisper even to her pillow for shame's sake. And now that which I thought hidden beyond discovery my father dragged to the light and bade me look at it. If there was any doubt as to his meaning he cleared it away with his next breath.

"A good lad, in his way as good a lad as thou art a lass and so my mind is easy. God be thanked there's no need to be clever to be good. If there were, the Narrow Way would be more lonely even than it is. But, Joan my girl, there must be no marrying until this is done."

"Father," I cried, my face flaming, and not daring to defend Dave, "I never thought of such a thing, nor he—never, never."

"Then eyes are greater liars than they were when

I was young," he answered. "But take it so. For the present I ask nothing better. Neither you nor he have thought of it, so there'll be the less hardship in the waiting. Joan," the thin voice grew solemn weak though it was I felt the change and gathered my scattered wits together that I might listen the better, "all your life you have trusted me, trust me now when I lay this charge upon you, marry no man till this quest is ended. I know men. God, He knows, there's reason I should. Some—the best of them, I grant that—would turn you from my purpose because of the danger, and I don't deny the danger. Others—" his head rolled upon the pillows in a negation of contempt, "others would steal your secret and leave you to the poorness of The Scaur for life. Marry none and tell none, that's the only safety. If David Catlett is the man I think he is, he'll wait and ask no questions. Jacob served fourteen years for the woman he loved, why should David not wait five?"

"Five?" I echoed, quite forgetting to protest that there was, and could be, no question of Dave Catlett at all.

"What are you but a child," he said, "but in five years you will be a woman, with a woman's shrewd sense, for you are no fool, Joan, and the very need will be a spur to you. Also, in five years you will understand the dangers and the pitfalls you don't even guess at now. Joan, girl," again there was that solemn deepening of the weak voice, but this time it shook as it had not shaken since he began to speak, and his hand tightened on mine with an unusual strength, "don't think I am callous because I bid you run into danger, don't suppose I think more of what lies South there than I do of my own girl. I have bidden you trust me, and if in my turn I did

not trust, if I did not believe with all my soul in the caring power and love and mercy of God, whose mercy I shall need this night, I would let it all rot where it lies. But it's clean, there's no taint on it—you must trust me for that—it's a right thing to seek it out, and you'll win through safely, of that make no doubt. Clean, yes, though blood was spilt in the winning of it, spilt in the keeping of it, spilt in the hiding it, and I alone am left; for all these things you must trust your father. Do you trust me, Joan child?"

Then I turned for the first time and kissed him on the forehead.

"Yes, father, in all things."

He lay still again, thinking as before, sorting out in his mind the needful from the unneedful as I supposed. The window was a small one and partly curtained, but even in the greyness I could see that his eyes were clear and placid. For the blood that had been spilt, whosoever's it was, no guiltiness lay on the soul of John Sharland, that I was, and am sure. When he spoke it was to hark back to what I had thought forgotten.

"In five years, too, the hoard may grow. Not by much. The farm will need help. I—no, Joan lass, don't cry, don't cry. At least not for me. For me the best's to come and you are too brave a lass to cry for yourself. And you will not be alone. There'll be friends, David—yes, I know, for the moment nothing matters but the old father! A good girl, always a good girl, and so I am not afraid to leave you. Where would God be? If I was afraid, I mean; why, there'd be none, no God. Nothing for poor souls to rest upon. What was I saying? Yes; the farm will need help, and so there'll be little to save; but save that little, maybe it's just that little

that will win you through. And tell no man of what is hidden in the wall; I'm a man and I'm afraid of men. Do you hear, Joan?"

"Yes, father," I compelled control to say. But he caught the break in my voice, for his hand closed on mine, and through the silence I heard his head turn on the pillow to look at me. Yet I did not venture to turn. If I had there would have been an end to fortitude. My prayer is that he understood, and I think he did, but our dearest so often fail to understand that I cannot be sure. Slowly his head turned back; pray God he understood.

"Some may say—you, Joan lass, amongst them—the man should have done the man's work and not have left it to a girl. But I promised your mother. She knew the story as you can never know it; it was her right to know and it was clean—why should she not know? But she grew afraid, inordinately afraid as loving women will, and I gave her a promise. I believe that in time she would have given it back to me, but what she feared for me came on her and the promise holds till the sea gives up its dead." He broke off with a shivering sigh, but only for an instant. "When will that be? For me, I mean. To-night? To-morrow? At the great Assize? 'Tis all one, for a thousand years are as a day; but the promise to the dead held—I durst not go south. And, Joan lass, because such a promise holds, think well how you pass your word to-night."

"Father, father," I cried, sobbing, for the sorrow of it cut me to the heart, "do no speak like that."

"All but fools face facts," he answered, "and what fact is more sure than this? But now you know why that which is a man's work is left to a girl, and why the girl has been schooled as you have been. I think

there's no more to be said. Will you be afraid, my girl?"

"No—yes—I don't know," I answered, stumbling into the truth at the last.

"At least you will wait the five years, still Joan Sharland? Think well before you answer."

But there was no need for thought. "Yes, father."

"And you will seek the quest—God helping you?"

"God helping me," I answered, and had he not put the words into my mouth I know not what I would have said.

"And—greatest of all—you will keep silence on what I shall now tell you until needs must that you speak?"

"Yes, father."

"No man must know, not even David Catlett; no, not even when you sail South. Now listen well, Joan, and with your ear close to my mouth."

Five times over, like one who drills a lesson into a dull child, he repeated slowly a very short form of words that must have been with him for five-and-twenty years waking and sleeping. Never once was there a variation. Then he bade me whisper them sentence by sentence till I was letter-perfect. After that he lay silent, his hand firm on mine, until I heard him whisper, "Ingots of gold—ingots of silver—cups, platters, jewels—all for you, Joan, all for you. Kiss me, daughter, and God keep my girl."

By that time night had fallen so that I could not see his face, but the tears were wet on his cheeks.

CHAPTER IV

EBB TIDE AND THE WINDS OF GOD

It is hardly to my blame if from time to time that night importunate thoughts dulled the edge of my anxiety. Though my father, saying he had need of nothing, refused to allow me to remain in his room I could not sleep, nor even sought to, but lay on my bed across the passage, with the two doors open between, listening. But my mind was in a whirl and imagination flew uncontrolled in all directions as if driven by the beating throb in my brain like sparks from an anvil.

I say imagination, because there was so much it was impossible clearly to understand, and, I grant, so little capacity for understanding. It was all a muddle, all a confusion, and when I tried to straighten out the tangle in would come the form of words I had learned, and a panic seized me lest they were forgotten. My pledge, or perhaps I should say my pledges, did not trouble me at all. At eighteen, five years hence is too far distant to cast shadows. Only middle age meets trouble half way; youth and elder age wait for them—the one because it has so much time, the other because it has so little.

Then there was—Dave. How had my father known? And how did he know that I would wish to have Dave for a—here my heart leaped so that I drew my breath with a little shiver and the sentence

was never ended. But how did my father know? Dave had always been the good comrade and never a word had passed that Parson Makepeace might not have called out from the Church pulpit had he chosen. Of late, too, I had been a little sharper to David, why I did not know, but now I knew and grew hot at the knowledge. Then I grew yet hotter at the thought that, if my father knew, Dave might know also. And he must never know—never! Never? I fetched a sigh at that. If five years were a long time never was—eternity. The blood seemed to drain from my heart at the thought; I did not know how short are the eternities of youth.

It was then that my father called me, "Joan, girl," in a voice thin but clear, and I woke from my dreaming to find that half the night was gone, a waning moon was riding white and high, and by its light I saw the hour was close on one o'clock. Both inside the house and out it was very still, the only sound a murmur of the sea drifted up by the north-east wind. Rising in great haste I crossed the passage, my heart full of a great fear.

My father lay facing the light and had pushed himself high up upon the pillow.

"Did you hear it?" he whispered.

"Hear what, father?" I asked, stooping over him.

"The Wind of God rising."

"I heard nothing but the sea."

"Aye, I heard that too. But there was more than the sea and more than the wind. God be thanked, there was a cry through the night. It is fifteen years since I heard her voice. Your mother is waiting, Joan child. Is the tide still on the make?"

"The tide, father?" I thought him wandering, it was so strange he should need to ask such a question. Farmer though he was, I had never known the hour,

day or night, when he could not have told the state of the tide. But he had asked in earnest and with my hand on his I paused, considering. "Yes, I think it must be."

"Go and see."

"But I am sure it is," I protested, "and what can it matter?"

"Very little," he answered, "but when the tide goes out the better part of that thing men call John Sharland goes with it. Go and see how long, Joan girl."

"And leave you alone?"

"Alone?" he echoed, "alone! When for fifteen years I have not heard her voice? You have much to learn. How long? Go and see, my girl."

And I went. There was more command in his voice than in the days when he had thundered, Do this—do that. There was now no such stress of compulsion, it was rather as if love said, Will you not do this for me? So I went, first stooping and kissing him on the forehead. Never can I forget how he put up his hand, touching my cheek, and whispering, "My bairn, my very dear bairn, God keep my bairn." Some men express their affection with difficulty. It comes from them like a stammer, and yet behind the halting words the great eloquent heart of love burns inextinguishable. So, I think, was it with my father. Poor inarticulate souls, they lose much and are lost to much through no fault of theirs.

Though the waters of the bay were clear in sight from the first curve of the slope it was not possible to tell the state of the tide from there. For that it was necessary to follow the dip of the hill two or three hundred yards, and I confess with shame that my first thought, as I stood in the porch, was to wait just where I was, then run back and say, yes, it is on the

make. It would be the truth, for I knew Whitcroft tides almost as well as he did. And yet I dared not; in some way that I did not pause to fathom I knew the truth would still be a lie. Supposing my father carried the memory of my lie with him as the tide went out? That would be terrible. Softly opening the wicket gate set in the fence enclosing our tiny garden I ran on and down.

Was I afraid? Even now I cannot tell. Perhaps the true answer is, Yes, but unconsciously. Never had I been abroad at such an hour, never with the moonlight white about me, and I a ghost upon a world that was itself ghostly. There were not many trees because of the storms, but the few there were took on weird shapes, fantastic contortions, such as I had never seen in the daylight, and of these I was afraid as I ran on under their shadow. Soon I could see the bay. The aftermath of a gale was rolling in, with here and there a glimmer of silver on their smooth, sleek sides; here and there a dark shoulder heaved up; here and there a spread of swirling foam where the undertow of a rock stumbled the on-rush.

But the welter of waters taught me nothing, and I ran on until Whitcroft itself lay visible; then I paused, awed by the strangeness and the beauty. Never had I imagined such a transformation. What by day was an ugly huddle of mean houses, a maze of winding, hilly streets and narrow lanes with beetling roofs that almost touched, rose from its many pools of shadow with the solemn wonder of some ancient ruin, each tall chimney, each moon-frosted gable a wreck of time, the record of a dead age. The church-spires and towers alone spoke of the living. Midway along the shoreward curve of the town my lord's new-built breakwater stretched, like a grey and ghostly marble arm flung across the gloom

of the sea with three tall ships hugged in its shelter, each spar and rope and block touched with a cold glow. Nearer, tumbled on the beach at all angles like great sea beasts asleep, lay the fisher boats whereby Whitcroft lived.

Yes, the tide was making, and would make for an hour yet. An hour? Less, perhaps! And my father had said that when it ebbed what men called John Sharland would go out with it. Full of compunction at the waste of minutes, I turned and fled up the hill, and home.

To see the harbour and measure the tide I had to quit the farm and follow the Whitcroft Road for a few hundred yards. Now, as I ran back, making for the open gate and thinking of nothing but my father left alone in the house, the fear I had forgotten found me. Right out of the coal-black blur of a tree shadow that lay half across the road a man stepped in front of me, his hand raised to warn me back, though, heart knows, I needed no warning, for I stopped dead, dragging my stride after me. So, for perhaps half a minute, we stood, till, forgetting everything but the foolishness of it, I laughed. Now that I saw him clearly I had no fear, though a stubble of hair over cheeks and chin gave him a forbidding ugliness. It may have been the moonlight, but he looked spent, and I, I knew, was the stronger limbed of the two. Because, too, of the trickiness of the light it was hard to judge his age, but afterwards I set him down for thirty or thereabouts.

"A girl!" he said at last. "In God's name, what are you doing here at such an hour?"

"'Tis no business of yours," I answered, "and I might ask the same question." They were the first words that came into my head, and I did not pause to consider them, for his voice frightened me. He

spoke as my father spoke at times, commonly when he was beyond himself. There was the same softening of certain letters, the same rolling of others.

"I have lost my right way," he said; "pray God you have not strayed further from yours."

What he meant I did not know, but I understood a reproach, and so answered him as directly as I could.

"My name is Joan Sharland. I live in the house you can see there beyond the pasture, and my father sent me to see the tide, and he's dying—dying all alone while I stand talking here. Oh, sir, as you're a Christian man, don't delay me."

"Dying?" he echoed, and again there was the sameness of inflection that had struck my ear at the first. "God's mercy go with him! Run, girl! But first, which is the road to Dunquester?"

"Follow as you go and then to the right," I cried, as I fled past him, nor did I halt until the garden gate stopped me.

My father lay as I had left him, his head high up upon the pillows and facing the light. So white and still was the face that a terrible fear gripped me, but before I could cry out his eyes moved; and, weak though he was, he must have read my thought.

"My bairn, my poor bairn," he said. "Not just yet, Joan girl. How soon to the ebb?"

The change of phrase smote me. "How long have I?" had become "How soon can I go?" Falling on my knees beside him I buried my face in the bedclothes, weeping as I had never yet wept. His hand touched my hair softly.

"My poor bairn," he whispered again. "The tug comes hard at the last. How soon?"

"Less than an hour, I think."

"An hour? Would you know her voice, Joan?"

"No, father."

"An hour!" he repeated. "I had not thought it was so long." Then he shivered as if a sigh shook him, and turned his face to the wall.

So we waited, I, at least, for I knew not what, but presently he turned back again.

"Say over what I told you. Good," he said, when I ended, and if I spoke haltingly it was from no fault of memory. What did gold or silver or the like matter! That he should have such things on his mind at the last seemed dreadful. Afterwards I understood better; his thought was for me, not of them.

"Tell no man, not even David. Now kiss me, Joan; later, I might not know that my girl kissed me."

So I kissed him on the forehead, and then, where I cannot remember ever to have kissed my father before—on the mouth.

"God bless and keep," he whispered twice over, "God bless and keep. And He will, have no fear. An hour, Joan? Then there is time to sleep." Time to sleep! No! Whatever lay hidden in the South had left no shame on John Sharland.

After that he turned his face again to the wall, and the only sound was the growing voice of the sea. From time to time I leaned over from where I knelt, but he was breathing quietly. Soon my clock across the pasage struck two, and a tremor shook him. It was the hour of morning when the powers of life run low. Leaning forward, I whispered was he cold, but he gave no answer, and soon I heard him say, "The ebb—the ebb of the world and the Winds of God blowing." But whether he wandered, or whether he heard the call of the sea or a voice I could not hear, I neither knew nor know. But his breath came

faster, shorter, and only by stooping low I caught, "The Winds—the Winds of God—stronger—stronger—Christ direct—Christ control—Christ—" Suddenly he turned, looking me full in the face, but, as I think, without recognising me. "And the sea gave up its dead," he said again. I stooped and kissed him, but his words had come true—he never knew it, unless, indeed, the touch of love in the yearning agony of its despair can pass beyond the veil.

CHAPTER V

SORROW AND SUNSHINE

NOT five hours later, as I sat forlornly in the porch, looking out dry-eyed across what seemed to me the blank of the world, I learned two things—my lord's great goodness of heart and that in God's mercy the blank is never utterly empty. Round the path that led back to the haggard, the gravel crunched and when I looked up it was my lord himself.

My face, I suppose, told its tale, for he asked no questions.

"My good, old friend," he said, and at the deep sorrow in his voice my tears rose, "my old friend who taught the boy to be a man and made him one. Mistress Joan, if it were not that he is at last where he long looked to be I could weep with you. But we do the dead a wrong to wish them back; rather let us say, God be thanked for a man who did a man's work in the world and has earned his rest. When did he die?"

"Past the stroke of two, my lord," I answered, then added, "with the turn of the tide."

"Aye, he always said he would go his last voyage with the ebb, and I doubt not the Winds of God were with him." He paused, and I was moved to ask how he knew so soon. That seemed to embarrass him, for he turned away but back again on the instant.

"Ill news, you know, travels fast." Again he

paused, then added earnestly, "Mistress Joan, I would ask a favour of you, forget that you had not the road to yourself last night. Your good father has told me that you can keep silence better than most, but you were asked the way to Dunquester, and so can guess how the news came. I only add, in keeping silence you will do no wrong."

"Of that I'm sure, my lord," I answered, thinking how little he knew my great need for the gift of a quiet tongue, and the gift was put to a speedy test, for my lord asked suddenly,

"Did your father say aught before he died?"

"Why do you ask that?" I replied, thinking to fence him. But I suppose the heart spoke truer than the tongue, as it always will if left to its own course, and the rush of colour in my white cheeks betrayed me, for he went on,

"It was in my mind that he would. You can safely trust me, Mistress Joan, if you will," he added with a shift of tone, seeing me hesitate.

The offence—no, not offence, my lord was too large-hearted a man for offence, but the soreness, the hurt in his voice troubled me. Here was a slip of a farming-girl throwing doubt on the honour of Dunquester.

"Oh, my lord," I cried, ready to weep, "save you and David Catlett there is no one to trust in all the world. Trust? It isn't that; but there's nought to be said!"

"Never?" he persisted, but the cold anger was gone from his voice.

That staggered me, and I paused for thought, though with very little clearness of brain to think. Certain things were sealed dumb for five years, certain things for longer, perhaps so long as I lived. But was I pledged to a stony silence which might spoil

my life, and so alienate all friendship that my father's very heart's desire would come to nothing? I could not think that such a silence was his wish—be sure it was not mine.

"Some day, but not yet."

"So be it; the promise stands. Whenever you are ready to speak you will find a friend at Dunquester ready to listen, and help. Now, Mistress Joan, it's not for me to speak comfort who have myself some need for comforting. For twenty years and more I have known John Sharland for God's gentleman. I think he loved me a little, and I who loved him much am the poorer for his loss. God rest him, as I doubt not He does. But apart from easing my heart by saying these things I came on two errands, to tell you that women will be down from Dunquester within the hour to do what is needful; Babington will bide here until all's over. She's a good soul, with a tender mother's heart, though she has never borne children. Then, the farm is yours as it was his, unless you have other plans," he added, the significance of a question in his voice.

"Thank you, my lord, for all your thought," I answered. "It's little wonder that Whitcroft loves Dunquester. As to the farm, he told me years ago of your promise and how it eased his mind; and what other plan could I have? The farm is my living."

He nodded, saying nothing, but watched me, his underlip pushed out as if in doubt, then laid a hand on my shoulder.

"We'll have another talk in two or three days' time. God comfort you, Joan, my girl." Whereat I fell to crying again; they were just the words my father would have spoken.

Of the next three days I need say only this, they

were so busied with the preparations for that eating and drinking without which no English folk can either mourn or rejoice that I had little leisure for sorrowful thought. If there is new life and a child's cry in the house beef and beer must welcome it; if it be marriage, beef and beer are second but to the parson; and when death creeps through the door beef and beer must follow at his heels. But through these days Mistress Babington taught me the grievous loss of these poor souls who have never known mothering. In the beginning, no doubt, it was womanly pity, and that my lord bid her be kind; but in the end I think she loved me for my own sake, and there never was a day yet when love could not lighten loss.

Then, after the funeral, my lord and David Catlett came back to the house that seemed so much more empty than through these three days, and the first thing my lord bade me do was throw wide the curtains and let in the sun.

"Though we are not of the one creed, Mistress Joan, I think we are both of the religion that has reverence and love at its roots. And no religion that lacks them is worth a snuff. Would the man we mourn shut out the sun from us? Not he! So we'll do as he would have us do and let in the brightness. That's better. Now to get to business. Three days ago you said you had none to trust in all the world but myself and Catlett. Here we are both; have you anything to say to us?"

"Nothing, my lord."

"Nothing?" He seemed disappointed, and his eyes searched me keenly. "But you can't live at The Scaur alone?"

"I have thought of that, my lord. I will have some one to live with me."

"Aye, I see. Some good soul of the Babington sort?"

But that was not my thought at all. Mistress Babingtons were few. She could not be spared from the castle, and why should she be spared to Joan Sharland? Nor could I afford to pay her. But there was more than that. Since my father's health had failed, and certainly for a full year past, I had been very much my own mistress. He had known all my doings and interfered less and less in them, and now I had no intention of setting up an authority over myself. My eighteen years would be despised by the wisdom of fifty, and before three months had passed I would cease to be mistress in my own house.

"I think not, my lord; a girl of twelve or fourteen who'll do as she is bid."

"Twelve or fourteen!" he cried. "That will never stand." His eyes lit on David's face and at sight of what he read there he jumped to his feet. "But we'll say no more about it to-day. Babington can stay on for the present. Mistress Joan, I'm twice your age and I'll say this to you. Your father loved you too dearly not to advise you well; follow his wish, whatever it may have been. Catlett, if you have anything to say to me later you know your way to Dunquester."

If I followed him to the porch it was not just that respect should set him on his way, having first thanked him for his kindness and condescension—which thanks he made light of and refused to hear—but also that I might have breathing space. For I, too, had seen David's face, and in spite of sorrow it had set my heart dancing. Was that callous or forgetful in me? I think not. My lord had told the simple truth when he said it would be my father's wish to let in the sunshine.

I have heard said that sun and clear air are worth more to the sick than all the drugs of the apothecary, and I can well believe it, seeing they are the direct gift of God. If it be true, then seeing that love is of His very self, how much more healing it must be to the sick and sorrowful of spirit? Surely to keep out either would be a sin? Then my lord's last injunction fell on me like a chill—do as your father would wish, whatever it may be; which meant, though my lord could not know it, wait five years. Five years! Shut out love for five years? Five years was life itself. There was no need for breathing space, and my face was sober enough when I went back to Dave.

"Joan," he began, and I had never known him so masterful. "What my lord said was right. Your plan can't stand. And why should it stand with Three Oaks waiting for you? Oh, Joan my lass," here the masterfulness broke down and vanished utterly away, lost in the plaint and pleading of the lover, "I've held my tongue because your father had need of you and I knew he'd never quit The Scaur and the sight of the sea while he lived, nor you him; but it was a sore distress and now the need's mine. Joan!" he put out his hands to me and they were shaking like a poplar leaf. God knows how I hungered to take them, but mine were hidden behind my back lest their trembling should betray me. There are times when the weak woman has to be strong for more than herself. "You have never shown sign that you have thought of me, never once, but—but—I love you, my dear, love you with all my heart. In all the world there's no woman but you, the sweetest, the truest, the bravest, the dearest; Joan, do you think—"

"Dave," said I, though how I spoke at all I don't

know, and how I broke into what set my heart dancing as if it could never quiet again I know still less. But it was not right that he should go on and plead for what was his already so far as I could give it, "Dave, listen, and I pray you don't touch me."

"Joan!" he cried in distress, "surely you are not afraid of me?"

"Afraid? No!" I answered scornfully, knowing that my fear was for my own weakness. "But sit you down at that side of the table and I'll sit at this. 'Twill be better so."

But when I got my way I did not know how to go on, and Dave, perplexed and a little angry beyond the table, as any lover might be at such treatment, gave me no help. Then I remembered my lord's last injunction and took shelter behind it.

"Dave, you heard what my lord said just now that I should do as my father wished; do you agree that he is right?" Poor Dave. At the moment I did not see the cleft stick I had thrust upon him, but it was no wonder he sat silent, glowering at me. Here had he been pouring out his heart, and my sole answer was—am I to do as my father bids me? That is where the cleft stick pinched. If he said, yes, he did not know what that bidding might be nor how it might shut him out; while if he said, no, he cast a doubt upon my father, for had not my lord said he loved me too well to advise me wrong? In the end he brushed it all aside except by inference.

"Joan dear," and I loved to hear him speak: it was only the second time in my life I had heard the word so spoken, "I respect your father from my heart, but unless it can be shown that the love and home I offer you are unworthy I admit no man's right, not

even his, to come between heart and heart, life and life."

"It's not that, Dave," and now it was I who felt the pinch and grew hot all over as I saw what was coming: but my life was at stake and there is such a thing as being too maidenly. "He always liked you, always. But suppose he saw more than I did? Suppose he saw that what has come to-day would come and said, Wait—"

"But," cried Dave, glowing, "if he said wait he did not say No, and he did not see that you would say No. Oh! Joan, dear—heart's dearest—"

"No, but Dave," driven by hard necessity again I broke in, "You have not answered me: What if he said wait?"

"I would not see the sense but I would wait. How long, Joan?"

"Five years."

Five years! Oh, poor Dave! even more poor Dave, I think, than poor Joan! For I had grown accustomed to the thought gradually. Indeed, it had first come at a time when five years' waiting was no hardship since there was nothing to wait for so far as I saw, whereas upon Dave it came like a blast of winter on the new-born warm heart of budding spring. The glow faded from his eyes, almost, I thought, the colour from his cheeks, and he sat back in his chair like a man dazed. If I had ever doubted David Catlett's love for me, and to doubt had never entered my head, there would have been an end to uncertainty, there and then, so full of pain and rebellion were his eyes.

"Five years!" he said at last, "No, Joan, surely not five years."

"He said Jacob served fourteen for the woman he loved." But a Patriarch's patience is small comfort

to a lover and Dave only gloomed the deeper until I added, "and who loved him," then the light woke in his eyes again.

"But he lived her life, was under the same roof, saw her every day—"

"While she saw him married to another."

"Yes, I know. That was damnable." Wherein, I take it, he spoke as a man and a lover and not as a Christian. Then he went on with a groan, "Five years! Must it be five years?"

"Yes, Dave, I think so."

"But, Joan, you love me, don't you?"

"Yes, Dave."

But he only sat looking at me stormily and groaned again,

"Five years! Five years with you here and I at the world's end, eating my heart out," which was his way of saying that Three Oaks was at the further side of my lord's estate, near that Cleveland the rhyme speaks of,

> Cleveland in the clay,
> Bring in two soles and carry one away.

"But your plan stands, Joan; and now I see it's sense. I mean that a whipper-snapper of twelve or fourteen can be sent packing out of the way, whereas a Babington woman—Oh, Lord! Five years!" He brought down his hand on the flat of the table, but not noisily. "Your father may have had wise reasons, but for my part I think the world would be all the happier and our lives sweeter for a little foolishness."

And I'm afraid I agreed with him, though I said nothing.

CHAPTER VI

DAVE HEARS THE TRUTH AND IS ANGRY

PERHAPS the greatest event of these five years was that twice I was able to add to the hoard hidden behind my bed-head: not much, for my inexperience was at times costly. I could farm: that is I could plough or harrow or reap, doing the manual part, but I could neither buy nor sell, and though my lord and Dave helped me all they could, it was not always possible to refer to either.

You may be sure that the very first time the gold was spread on the bed I counted it—two hundred and seventy-seven guineas, allowing for the difference in face value of the older coins; not much truly to show for over a score of years of a man's life and labour and not just life and labour only, but pinching and self-denial. Never once had we known a luxury. Yet to me it seemed a gigantic sum, a possession for pride to glory in, until I remembered all that it must accomplish, and then pride shrivelled like a pricked bladder. Truly it was pitifully little to do so much.

But it was only during the last year of the five that I gave this inadequacy serious thought. Then, as realization pressed home, I gloomed as Dave had gloomed that day with the table and what seemed an eternity between us.

Most naturally that change in me perplexed and troubled him. Here was he daily gayer and more

light of heart as the end of his probation drew nearer, while I, who should have rejoiced with him, grew dull, spoke little, and always seemed to have my thoughts at the world's end, which in a manner was true. Not only by day but even by night I was groping after ingots of gold, ingots of silver, cups, platters, jewels. Not, woman though I was, that I cared for these, but they rose like a ghost between me and the quiet life with Dave that my soul hungered after, nor could there be peace till the ghost was laid.

Naturally, too, Dave took the lover's view and grew suspicious of my love for him, so that these last few months before my twenty-third birthday were very unhappy. I do not blame Dave, but to me it is strange that love cannot trust love but must needs suspect a baseness. Neither jewels nor ingots of gold were worth the sorrow.

In one thing I had deceived Dave, or at least had not told him the full truth ; he counted the five years from my father's death, I from my birthday. Perhaps I was wrong, certainly my father said five years and did not mention age at all ; but then he spoke of growing to womanhood, and I always thought he had the difference between eighteen and twenty-three in his mind. And if a woman is not a woman in all essentials at twenty-three she never will be one.

In my heart I acknowledged that his foresight was justified. In the five years my knowledge of the world had grown, I understood the dangers and the pitfalls hidden in the South Adventure as eighteen never could. In these years, too, labour and exercise had hardened my muscles without, I am woman enough to say thankfully, spoiling either my carriage or shapeliness. They had given me a man's strength and yet not robbed me of my woman's grace ; I had eyes in my head to see and I knew.

My thought in continuing the deception, if deception it could be called, was that the shortening of the time might lessen Dave's dismay. In every hour of waiting or suspense it is always the last five minutes that count. If I cut off these five minutes, and so brought the end nearer, Dave might think less of what lay between—the separation and the danger south. But he did not, he thought the more, and I loved him for the unreason.

"Ingots of gold—jewels," he said vexedly, as if such things were the mere refuse of the world. "No, but Joan, we have enough and each other. I understand now why you fretted and pulled sour faces. What do we want with ingots or cups or platters? The chief thing is the five years are up, praise God! To-morrow I shall see Parson Makepeace—no, to-day, and—"

"Dave, listen," I sidled up to him, laid my head on his shoulder and put an arm round him shamelessly. We were seated on the bench in the still-room, and Nan, my little maid, had been packed safely out of the way, according to Dave's plan. "You are not going to be angry with me on my birthday, are you? Well, then, first I promised father—no, but listen—then, you did not expect the five years to end just yet, so there is no time lost——"

"Five years lost," he said, and I think he said it between his shut teeth. "Are five years nothing?"

"Yes, but they're past."

"Then I shall go to old Makepeace."

"That is," I went on as if he had said nothing, and as if my own heart was not in equal rebellion, "until to-day you thought there were three months of the five years to run. Dave, dear, how can I get South and—and—back in the three months?"

"It can't be done, Joan."

Then, Dave, we'll just have to wait a little longer."

"But I meant you can't go South, as you call it. It's not to be thought of."

"I must try, Dave dear."

Whereat he pushed me from him—not roughly, jumped to his feet, and fell to striding up and down the room, swinging his clenched hands as he walked. It was Dave's way of thinking out things, and I left him in peace.

There's nothing more distracting to a man's temper than to have his thoughts broken by a patter of words when he is trying hard to piece a disjointed puzzle together.

"Where is this damned place, Joan?"

"I can't tell you, Dave." It was not Dave's way to swear, least of all before a woman, but I think I liked the force of the word just then. It told me a little of what was in his mind, and showed me something of what troubled my own.

"You don't know?"

"I know, but I must not tell."

"Not me?"

"Not even you, Dave. That is why I must go myself."

"And what's hidden?"

"I told you, Dave. Ingots of gold and silver—jewels—I don't know what all."

"Some bloody pirate's thievery."

"Do you mean John Sharland?"

He stopped short in his stride. "No, Joan, no, of course not, no one could think that of your father. But I'm half mad I think—who wouldn't be? You to go South, treasure-hunting, God knows where, while I—no! I don't stay behind, that's flat. Don't ask it of me, Joan, for I won't," and he glared at me stormily.

"Thank you, Dave; that's an end to half my trouble. Father always said you would help me."

"And did you think I would let you go alone?"

"I thought—indeed, Dave, I don't know what I thought, but I feared you would say no, and drive me in upon myself."

"Joan, lass!" His face softened marvellously. I never thought a man's face could grow at once so tender and so wistful. Putting his arm round me he lifted me from the bench, laid my head against his breast and kissed me very gently. "Drive you in upon yourself when you had most need of me? It's little you know of a man's love!" Whereat, I think, for a little while we forgot The Scaur, and the months to come, and the terrors of the unknown hidden in them.

Soon he set me back on the bench, and standing over me, went on,

"Joan, don't fly out at me if I speak my mind, for it's my right to think for you. They say none can find so well as the one who hides. Why did not your father go South himself?"

I told him in as few words as I could just what father had told me, and his face grew a little grim as he listened.

"Again I say, don't fly out at me, but a broken will and a promise are poor reasons for sending a girl, and that girl a daughter, to the gates of hell and perhaps beyond."

"A promise to the dead holds," I said.

"Maybe," he answered. "My belief is the dead understand better than the living and are more ready to forgive. But we won't argue it. Why beat on a burst drum! But if I'm to help, Joan, I must know more than I do. And I have some claim to know. If it's your life at hell's gate or beyond, it's mine too."

At that I took fright and caught him by the arm, crying in a panic, "No, Dave, you shan't go. I won't have you risk—"

But he checked me, as much by his look as his words.

"Hush, Joan, hush; we can't argue that either: it's another burst drum. There's nothing more to be said, where you go I go, please God. Or if you must argue here's the answer. If it's too great a risk for a man what is it for a woman? How far South, Joan?"

"I can't tell you, Dave."

"You said something of the sort a while ago, but you thought that was answering curiosity, now it's the will to help that asks, and how can I help if I'm altogether in the dark? How far South?"

That was reasonable. "Beyond the line, Dave."

His face fell. "Good Lord! As far as that?" Again he turned down the room, but this time there was no vexation in his eyes, only the concern of deep thought. Opposite me he halted. "Joan, once and for all, not to distress you with nagging, which is a thing I hate in man or woman, but—must this thing be?"

"I promised, Dave."

"I know." He fetched a sigh. "And what you say you hold to. I don't know that I would have it otherwise—except for this. South of the line? That's half the world. Can you tell me any more—put me any nearer to it?"

"No, Dave, I think not."

"It was the day before he died he told you?"

"That very night."

"Was he wandering at all?"

"As clear in the head as you are."

"But with this in his head all these years he must have had some plan?"

For a moment I hesitated, then, "Wait, Dave," I said, and ran upstairs. To pull my bed aside, chisel out the hardened dough, lift the stone to the floor, catch the leather bag and run down again leaving the hole gaping took me five minutes. Pulling open the thong I spilled the guineas out on the table and turned to Dave, breathlessly.

"We have that between us."

"That!" If my bladder of pride had not shrivelled before it would have crumpled now as Dave pushed the coins almost pettishly aside. "What can that do? How much is there?"

"Three hundred and four guineas." For the first time my voice broke. I could not bear to see him make so little of what had cost so much. "It's all our savings and we pinched and pinched—"

"My poor girl. That was the reason, was it?" He caught me in his arms to comfort me and to the same end tore truth to tatters, though I do not think it will be held against him. "It will go far, Joan, very far. I was wrong. Three hundred and four guineas! I had not thought there was so much. With what I can raise it will far more than do."

That frightened me again. "Raise? No, Dave; you must risk nothing."

"Joan, girl, have sense. I'm risking life and you. Compared with these what does any risk count? Besides," he added with a subtle shift in his voice, "won't your ingots and jewels pay for all in the end?"

"Yes, Dave, but suppose we don't find them?"

"Aye, suppose we don't find them," he repeated. "Joan, dear, must you go?"

"Yes, Dave, I promised."

"Well, then, there's no more to be said on that head," and my heart went out to him in gratefulness

and more than gratefulness that there was neither reproach nor anger in his voice, not even vexation. "With your guineas and mine we'll find a way. And we'll always have each other. That pays for everything. I'll see Parson Makepeace to-day—"

"When we come back, Dave."

He put me from him in a kind of angry astonishment and stepped back.

"Joan, it's our one hope, our one safety. How can I watch over you if—"

"Dave, I promised."

"Such a promise should never have been forced," he flamed. Never had I seen Dave so angry. "Your father knew the world and you did not; he should never have asked such a promise."

"It was because he knew he asked it."

"How so?"

"Don't fly out at me, Dave; but he said that if I married first, a husband might have all he wanted and so not let me go."

"I would have all I wanted," said Dave, a tender indignation in his voice, if such a thing can be, "and yet if I had promised I could have let you go."

"Yes, Dave, but you are not like other men."

Oh, eternal, ever-blessed alchemy of love! In that which you transmute there are no baser earths. Through you the proverb is reversed, and all that glitters is pure gold: through you the dewdrop or the flamed spar is the perfect diamond of Golconda. If all the world fails to worship at the shrine which you set up it is because a universal blindness has fallen, and love alone has eyes to see. Not that David Catlett was tinsel or false crystal. Pure gold he was and something greater than gold. In that I said he was not like other men I said truly; and yet, having promised, I held to my word.

Nor would Dave listen to any argument against raising money on what he held at Three Oaks.

"It's settled I am to go, is not that so? Well, then, am I to go at your charges? That's impossible, so that's settled too." Nor did he add, what I knew was the trurh, that my little hoard of guineas would be all too small even for myself. That was one of the ways in which Dave was not like other men. "I must see my lord first thing; he'll advise me well, I'm sure."

Nor did I object. Advice we must have, and in any difficulty it seemed only natural for all Whitcroft to turn to Dunquester.

CHAPTER VII

DUNQUESTER TAKES A HAND

It may be that, in addition to Whitcroft's well-founded faith in Dunquester, David Catlett had the injunction of almost five years before in his mind.

"If you have anything to say to me you know your way to Dunquester." At that time he had needed no man's help to bear his burden, nor had he seen any reason for the injunction, but now the weight was beyond his strength.

He was afoot. No horse could be spared from the March ploughing for riding, and the fifteen or twenty minutes' walk gave him time to set his thoughts in order. For six years he had not found it easy to think either calmly or conclusively with Joan Sharland near at hand. Her mere presence was enough to wreck the continuity with perplexing and tantalizing suggestions.

Mostly men do not know why they love a woman, but David Catlett knew. There were many reasons, there always must be, unless it is that she is she, which is no reason at all and yet the best in the world. Of these many reasons only one matters for the present—that knowing her own mind she held steadfastly by her purpose. It was, therefore, foolish to waste time, foreseeing difficulties which might daunt courage but could not prevent attempt. The wisest course was to grapple with that which lay nearest—

the need for money, which is as much the sinews of enterprise as it is of war. Dave felt my lord would advise him. How much would be required? There, too, my lord could advise.

At the castle there was a brief delay. Yes, my lord was within, but he was engaged with Mr. Macdonald. Would Mr. Catlett wait? Farland, the footman, Whitcroft born and bred, as were almost all who served the Castle, knew David well for one of the most substantial of the Dunquester tenants, and respected him accordingly, that is to say without reserve. Wait? Of course Dave would wait.

The March evening was raw with cold, a biting air drifted in from the North Sea, and apart from his respect for Dunquester there was a pleasant animal comfort in standing over the great fire of logs crackling, smouldering, blazing, dulling, all at the one moment, in the open hearth, so deep and wide of mouth it was.

But the delay was short. Very soon the footman was back again. Would Mr. Catlett come this way? and almost immediately Dave found himself in a room of Dunquester that was new to him.

His one impression was that it was dimly lit, that there was a good fire ablaze, and that there were two men in the room: which might be said to be three impressions, but that he caught them all in the one glance. My lord, who was nearer the door, rose at once, his hand extended.

"Well, Catlett, what brings you so far from Three Oaks at this time o' night? Macdonald, this is Mr. David Catlett: you will have seen him many a time if you have never met. For six generations there have been Catletts of Three Oaks, and for the sake of Dunquester I hope there be for another six generations and more. Mr. Macdonald and I were just having an after-supper drop of punch together, I'll

ring for another glass. Draw in that chair beside you."

Macdonald, too, had risen, a smaller-built figure of a man than Lord Dunquester. In the uncertain light —the lamp was turned low and shaded, and the changing flicker of the fire was a hindrance to sight rather than a help—David recognized a strong-featured, clean-shaven face and guessed at a dark suit of an unusual cut. The name—he had heard it before —was strange thereabouts: there were no Macdonalds round Whitcroft. Each bowed in silence and until the glass had been fetched and the door closed none spoke. Then, "There, Catlett," said my lord, filling the glass, "that will warm your blood. There is nothing astray at Three Oaks, I hope?"

"No, my lord. In a manner it's no business of my own that brings me, though it would not be quite true to say that either. But not to waste time. You will remembe the death of John Sharland nearly five years ago?"

"John Sharland? Surely." He turned to Macdonald. "Five and twenty years ago and more John Sharland taught me how to swim, how to sail a boat, how to—well, almost how to be a man and unafraid. He held a small farm from me, but I always thought John Sharland was more than he seemed."

"You mean that he had been a sailor?" said Macdonald. It was the first time he had spoken and the voice was no more Whitcroft than the name.

"Not just that. That was plain, though he never spoke of seafaring, nor of his past at all, for that matter. No, I mean that he had come down in the world and of his own free will; had, perhaps, quarrelled with his family and run away to sea in his youth and that pride still kept him where he was. In some

ways he was unapproachable. He died, as Catlett says, five years ago. I remember I tried to get from his daughter—as fine a girl, Macdonald, as there is in the whole north country—whether he had not made some disclosure at the last—his true name, his family and so on. And there was something. She admitted as much, but was as unapproachable as he had been.

"Yes," said David, "there was something." He paused a moment, then went on slowly, "and because of that something I am here to-night, my lord."

Macdonald rose. "You have estate affairs to talk over with Mr. Catlett; I'll go browse in the library till you have finished."

"Now, Catlett, sit down again and tell me what's this about Sharland," said Dunquester when the two were alone. But David Catlett's thoughts had taken a new turn.

"Do you still think as you did, my lord?" he asked.

"Think what?"

"That John Sharland was not as I am?"

"Don't put it that way. I think Sharland was not his name, that for some reason he had stepped down in life, that his people had cast him off, or, more likely from what I knew of him, that he had cast them off, that, had he chosen, he might have been —well, something different. Am I right?"

"I don't know, but he said nothing of that kind."

"Then why ask me what I thought, and how can it matter?"

"Nothing at present, but latter on, perhaps yes," answered Dave soberly. "But, my lord, you were quite right. He had been a sea-faring man, and he had a treasure hidden South somewhere, and now Joan must go and fetch it. Joan, mind you, Joan herself. That's what he told her the night he died."

"A treasure? Joan go and fetch it?" Dunquester straightened himself in his chair. "Was he in his senses at all?"

"As clear as I am, Joan says, and I believe her."

"But that was five years ago?"

"Yes, my lord, but this is the way it was," and, as much as possible in Joan's words, David told the story of John Sharland's last night of life. "To wait five years till she grew to be a woman in sense and strength was part of his purpose," he ended, "and now nothing will do Joan but she must go South."

For a time Dunquester sat silent, piecing together scraps of memory to confirm the story.

"Then all that cutlass and pistol work was part of the preparation?" he said at length and laughed. "Did they ever tell you of the trick the little hussy—she was no more than a child at the time—played on me? I held out my hat to test her courage, and she shot so near my fingertips that, faith, my nails tingle now when I think of it. Do you believe this tale of a treasure, Catlett?"

"Yes, my lord, but it's all one whether it's true or not, go South Joan will, and I," he added slowly "go South with her."

"Ah!" said Dunquester, I thought there was something of that five years ago. Do you remember. I bade you come and tell me if you had anything to say as to Mistress Joan's future."

"And I have nothing to say now," answered Dave, staring down into the smouldering logs. "We'll not talk of it, my lord, if you please, but Joan Sharland will be no man's wife until this—this South adventure is over, and then—well, then there may be something else to be said." He looked up suddenly, "I don't blame her," he protested. "She promised. She's her father's daughter, and what she says she'll hold

to. But I blame John Sharland, I blame him bitterly. He might have trusted me."

"Then he knew, Catlett?"

"He guessed, my lord."

"The girl's a fool—"

"To hold to her word? John Sharland's daughter?"

"No, I don't say that," answered Dunquester slowly and sat silent. Then, "this treasure, what is it?"

"Gold and silver ingots, silver cups, jewels cut and uncut; she knows no more."

"What's your idea, Catlett? If it were not for John Sharland one would say some pirate or buccaneer's loot, but I can't think that of Sharland."

"In my soreness I was fool enough to hint such a thing, and Joan withered me in a sentence. I'll not hint it a second time, nor think it. He told her it was clean, and in the same breath that there was blood upon it. My idea is this, my lord, that Sharland ran away to sea, as you said, and lost himself South, that he and others happened on some pirates' hoard—how, God knows—fought for it and won it, so blood was spilt in the taking; that they quarrelled over the division, some being, perhaps, no better than the pirates themselves, and Sharland fought for his rights—who can blame him—and so blood was spilt in the keeping; that as they hid the hoard they were set upon by God knows who, and so blood was spilt in the hiding, perhaps Sharland alone was left, he said almost as much. There's my idea, my lord. A great treasure, a very great treasure, Sharland called it. Some might say that all that blood was a taint, but for him there was none. The taint would lie in the thieving, and not in the hard fighting and spilling of blood. When did England

win and hold except by hard fighting and the spilling of blood? To him these were nothing but a man's risks. Aye, a man's risks," repeated Dave with a bitter emphasis, "but no risks for a girl, no risks for Joan Sharland, and yet South she will go though there may be these risks and worse. I told her it was hell's open door, but she'll go."

Dunquester nodded thoughtfully. "I should not wonder but you have hit it," he said at last. "Where is it hidden?"

"South of the line, she'll say no more."

"South of the line! In heaven's name, how is Joan Sharland going to get there?"

"I don't know yet. I'm here to ask your advice. What will it cost, my lord?"

"How should I know? The whole scheme is mad. Give it up Catlett, that's my advice, give it up."

"And give up Joan, for that's what it comes to."

"But when she sees you won't budge—"

"She will go all the same, and if good hands won't help her she'll trust bad. Let her story get wind and she will have her pick of all the rascals from here to Plymouth. Perhaps that's what Sharland had in mind when he taught her to shoot and to hold her tongue. My lord, I'm going; there's no more to be said. The one question is—money, and how much? My idea was—you'll forgive the presumption, my lord, but we all look to Dunquester in our troubles—you know, you have taught us to—my idea was that your lordship might advance what's wanted on the stock, and what is in the haggards at Three Oaks. Then, if all went right, I am sure Joan would recoup me the cost—"

"Recoup? why, man, she would be your wife."

"There's a question there after what you said to

Mr. Macdonald, but with your lordship's leave we won't discuss it," said Dave a little grimly. "If your lordship would let me finish. If all went well I have no doubt Joan would recoup the cost with such interest as your lordship would think right, and Three Oaks would be mine again none the worse. Then, if it failed, if it was all a dream, if there was no treasure, or she could not find the place, and thirty years must make a vast difference down there, why—" Dave paused, took a long breath or two, then went on, "why perhaps your Lordship would give us The Scaur. I would like to be still under Dunquester." Again there was a pause until Dave went on, his eyes fixed again on the dulling fire, "It's asking a great deal I know, but your lordship has always spoilt us. And I think you would run no risk. Three Oaks is —well, Three Oaks is Three Oaks."

"And after six generations you would give up Three Oaks?"

"For Joan's sake—yes."

"For a girl's whim."

"No, my lord, for a woman's belief in her duty. That I love the woman I suppose makes a difference. Not that I don't love Three Oaks, but I can see no other way, and Joan comes before Three Oaks."

"You have a young brother, haven't you?"

"Yes, my lord; Hal is twelve."

"What will you do with him?"

"Take him with me, for go I must. But how? That's where I need your advice, my lord."

"Stay quiet and let me think."

Shaking himself lower in his chair Dunquester pushed out his feet to the fire, crossed the left arm over his chest and gripped his chin with the thumb and finger of the right hand. To those who knew him well the attitude was characteristic: where it was

possible he slipped into it, quite unconsciously, when facing a decision of moment. When at last he spoke it was to shoot a curt question.

"When must she go?"

"There's no must as to a day, my lord, but it's plain that the sooner—"

"Aye, t'were well it were done quickly."

Again there was silence. Twice or thrice he looked at Dave, but not as if about to speak: it was rather a slow, steady scrutiny, as if he weighed him in his mind, searching out what manner of man lay behind the comely face, the well-knit muscles and strong limbs. Suddenly he twisted round, groped for his half-filled glass, tasted its contents, flung what was left into the fire and rising filled it from the bowl, tasted that in turn, muttered, "Pah! it's cold too!" and half flung himself into the chair vacated by Macdonald. The shift brought him face to face with Dave, the hearth between.

"Six generations of Catletts," he said. "Dave—it was the first time he had ever called him Dave—I think you love Dunquester a little."

"Yes, my lord, and for cause," answered Dave. The opening perturbed him. It sounded mortally like the preliminary to refusal, the giving of smooth words to soften excuses.

"Cause? I've lived among my own, that's all." He was silent a moment, then spoke out abruptly. "I have a better plan than yours. What do you say if I make the South Adventure?"

"You, my lord!"

"Oh, not I alone, you too, and Mistress Joan of course."

"But why—"

"Now, Catlett, why ask whys? Only a fool quarrels with his meat and you're not that. Suppose

I'm restless, suppose I'm tired of Dunquester, tired of doing to-day what I did yesterday and last week, suppose—" His voice trailed off into silence but only for an instant; and when he spoke again it was in a changed tone. A deeper note displaced the half-bantering, half-querulous challenge. "No, that won't do. That's no way to treat a Catlett of Three Oaks, a Catlett of the sixth generation, David Catlett least of all. If a fool quarrels with his meat it's just another fool who deceives his friends with make-believes. And you wouldn't believe me. Tired of Dunquester! God forbid! Here's the truth. As I read the times it would be as well for me to be out of England for a few months to come."

"Indeed, my lord," cried Dave, "I have no right to ask why, and no need to know, but the surprise of it took me aback."

"No right to ask but the right to know; above all, the right to be trusted," answered Dunquester slowly. "Only, I think you will have to guess it in part. Six years ago—you remember six years ago? Aye! it would be a short memory that could forget. Well, six years ago His Majesty's most honourable Government—a king gets the Government he deserves, I think, Catlett—pretended doubt of me. Why, since I never stirred from Dunquester? Perhaps because I am of the old religion; the religion the Stuarts have turned to in the days of their distress, perhaps because it is known that I have friends up north, and that I hate the ways of the Walpole-Townshend crew. That's past and forgotten, you'll say. Forgotten! a man's friends forget but his enemies never! What then? Here, Dave, is the point. Last December, the very last of the year, a son was born to—" he hesitated an instant as if in doubt of a word, then went to, "to James Stuart. Poor babe! He had

better never been born, but his birth has put fresh courage into a lost cause. Here, say fools, wastrels and hotheads, is an heir to the line of kings! Very clearly I foresee a hopeless outbreak—six years ago I was threatened; for the present, until the bubble has come to a head and burst, I am better out of England. A coward? No, Catlett, I think not. It is not cowardice to turn one's back on the maelstrom and swim beyond the grip of the vortex. So, with your leave, we'll fare South together."

"My lord," Dave's voice shook as he spoke, shook almost as it had shaken the day his heart had cried out to Joan five years before, "it's not for me to question your lordship's wisdom, but to leave Dunquester, and on such a business as this may be! God knows what lies before us. See what Sharland thought of it when he schooled Joan as he did. If John Sharland were alive would he sit dumb while Dunquester risked—"

"Wait, Dave. There is another side to it. You heard me tell Macdonald that John Sharland taught the boy to be a man; there was more than that, he taught the boy not to be a coward. For shame's sake I boggled over the word with Macdonald, but to you I say it straight out—how not to be a coward. The need and the cure are bygones, thank God, but the memory remains. Partly this is to repay John Sharland. While he lived no repayment was possible; he was too much my—too much like myself for payment to be possible."

"But, my lord," in the honesty of his heart Dave Catlett still protested against the very desire of that heart, "have you considered? An hour ago you had no thought of this."

Dunquester looked aslant at the fire before answer-

ing, his brows knit, his lips pushed out in thought: then. "Do you believe in the finger of God?"

The sudden shift of thought took Dave aback: the question perplexed him. Subtleties of theology were outside the course of his common daily life.

"No, my lord," he said at last, "I cannot say that I do."

"Nor did I until to-night. Mostly we take what we want by the throat, run it here or there as we incline, and when we have set it just where we meant to, we say, The finger of God! But what am I to call to-night? It's true, an hour ago I had no thought of this, but an hour ago our need to leave England was what Macdonald and I debated. Yet, where to go? To cross to France was to make suspicion certainty. Then you came in. Was that not the finger of God? Were not, as John Sharland would have said, His winds blowing? Say no more, Dave, except to Mistress Joan. And listen, she has a fine capacity for silence, let her keep silent now. You said a true thing a while ago—if this got wind we would have every rascal from this to Plymouth taking a hand."

CHAPTER VIII

MY LORD SIGNS-ON UNDER CAPTAIN JOAN

THREE days passed before Dave found time to return to The Scaur. Because of bad weather ploughing was behind. Need was there to drive when the change came, and work will never be pushed on double-tides with the master away. But when he came on the third day at night-fall his news both staggered and troubled me.

"My lord!" said I. "Why should my lord come? Dave, I'll not have even my lord coming between me and what I have to do out there beyond."

"Joan, lass, how could he?"

"He might grow tired and cut me short in my search. If the place is slow to find, and it may be slow after all these years, he might say there's enough time wasted, we'll go back. Then if I cried out he might say, I'm Lord Dunquester, who are you to say no to me?"

"He never would. Don't you know him better than that?"

"Well, but why does he go at all?"

That staggered Dave in turn. Later, of course, I came to know the true reason but at that time Dave could not give it. He held that my lord had spoken into his ear as man to man. He could neither say to me, Dunquester is under suspicion; nor, John Sharland taught Dunquester the shame of being a

ccward. But that brought up the memory of why my lord could not presume to repay John Sharland the debt he owed him, and the change which came over Dave's face so frightened me that I forgot my grievance.

"Dave, what is the matter?"

"There's nothing the matter," he answered. But his voice gave him the lie and I persisted.

"There is, Dave. Do you think I don't know your dear face, every line of it?" Putting my hands on his shoulders I held him close to me. It is hard for a man to say No to the woman he loves, or to fence words with her, held like that. "What is it, Dave? You must tell me. I'm to trust you with myself when all this is done with, while you—" He groaned and tried to put me from him but I held him fast. It was not fair fighting, but I don't think we women care so much for the fairness if only we can win, "while you," I went on, "won't trust me. What is troubling you, Dave?"

"It's that I'm not good enough for you, Joan," he said and groaned again. Poor Dave! He often groaned those days. I think your true lover is always either *in excelsus* or cries *de profundis*: he is never on earth's level until he comes to know that the woman herself is of the earth, and by that time, alas, he may have ceased to be the lover.

"Not good enough? What do you mean, Dave? You had no thought of that when you asked me where was the—the damned place. What has happened since?"

He wrenched himself free and stepped back.

"It's my lord. I had meant to say nothing until—" he boggled as I had—"until all this was over and you safe back, though speaking now makes no difference. But my lord says, and I agree with him,

that John Sharland was of his class and not mine, that he was a gentleman while I—we'll say no more of that. But when all this is over, Joan, and your fortune safe, you will have no need to stick in the Cleveland clay, where I belong."

"And is that the reason—that John Sharland was better than David Catlett—that my lord is coming where no one asked him?"

"Partly," answered Dave, miserably. "But he did not put it that way." I knew he hated to hear my lord so spoken of, but he dared not resent it. I was too angry to listen, just as I was too angry to be just.

"And if he were not coming it was your idea to pawn Three Oaks, hold your tongue till all was over, with my fortune safe, as you say, and then turn your back on me? Does my lord know and approve of this nonsense of yours?"

"No, Joan."

"It's as well. If he had he would never have set foot on ship of mine and you may tell him so. Which was it, Dave, my high nobility or the wealth down South that was to make me too good for you—too good for the truest-hearted, least self-seeking, gentlest gentleman that—that—ever stuck in the Cleveland clay? My high nobility! Joan, the farmer-lass! Joan that follows the plough-tail! If it weren't that my heart is too sore and too proud—proud of you, Dave—I could laugh at the miserable folly. And the wealth? I'll tell you this, Dave, lest the thought lie in your heart like a canker, if I thought that what lies buried down South could come between you and me I would not go, promise or no promise. Father never meant me to lose love; father never meant me to lose you, which is the same thing. He always said David Catlett would help."

"Help! Joan, lass, you and I together, and I want no more. But I had to speak."

"And now that you have spoken we need say no more. Or, yes, I'll say this. I care little whether or not my lord is right, and if I care at all it is that whatever it might bring I could give to you. Such a thing as that part us! Truly, Dave, it is little you know of a woman's love," and as I said it I wondered if he remembered that I was just quoting himself with one word altered.

"Now," I went on, "what does my lord suggest? Remember, Dave, I'm not going to be a puppet to dance just as he pulls the strings."

"Joan, my heart, don't speak like that of my lord. Can't you see what a gain this is to us?"

"I can see that; but tell me that my lord gains nothing, and I'll be as grateful as you can wish."

"No, I can't say that, but he need not do what he is doing."

"Yes, Dave, that is all very well," said I, "but what is he doing? I don't ask his reasons. You know them and that is enough for me. Surely I have the right to know what's in his head? Why, out there beyond he can do nothing without me, nothing at all."

"But, Joan—"

"But, Dave, if you won't ask him I will."

At the time I meant it, for my spirit was roused by the thought that what I had feared and brooded over for five years would be turned at the last into an excuse for my lord's pleasure-seeking, and I told, like a wayward child of no significance or concern, to take what I got and be good and ask no questions. But when my lord came down to The Scaur the very next afternoon as I was ploughing the Burnt Elm field I grew ashamed. And I grew yet more ashamed

the way he took it all, for Dave must have told him more than I meant. It is never fair to a woman to repeat her pettishness or her vexation, and Dave, after five years' experience of me, should have known as much.

I was ploughing up hill when I heard the gate clap, and looking behind me saw my lord in the field, his back against the bars. I never paused, but the start it gave me drove the point aslant, and we had gone a yard or two before I was in line again. The headland was turned fairly enough and I kept a straight line down hill, though my heart was thumping and the broken furrow vexed me; then crying to the team to halt I went forward to meet my lord. He took off his hat with a flourish, and grave though his face was, I caught a laugh in his eyes.

"Captain Joan, I've come aboard, ma'am, if so be you'll have me for service."

"Oh, my lord," I began, but he cut me short.

"No, no; cabin-boy Dunquester, or any other rating you'll grant him on your ship, so long as—for the peace of the company—it is not cook. Your ship, you understand, Captain Joan."

"My lord," said I, going back to primal days by a long cast of heredity and laying the blame for my fault on someone else, "Dave has been saying what he should not."

"I give you my word, No," he answered, and this time there was no banter in his voice. "My friend Dave has only reminded me of what I should never have forgotten. I'm here to-day to say it. Mistress Joan, first and last this adventure is yours and yours only. It will be our business to be the puppets while you pull the strings. I am to blame that I did not come to tell you this three days ago. But even the best of us fails to drive a straight furrow at times,"

and the twinkle was back in the eyes as he nodded up hill. "Am I forgiven?"

"Oh, my lord," I answered, almost ready to cry, for he had quoted my very words to Dave, "it is I who can never forgive my ingratitude."

"Nonsense," said he, "but we'll say no more about it. I should have remembered that you have a way of shooting straight once you loose the trigger. But we cannot talk here. What had we best do?"

"We'll go to the house, if you please, my lord," I said. "I'll send Nan for the horses, she knows enough to stable them."

"Nan?" he repeated as he held the gate for me to pass through. "How many Nans have you had at The Scaur since you would have nothing to do with poor Babington's kind?"

"She is the third," I answered. "When they grew too old I found something else for them to do and got one younger."

"Too old!" he laughed. "What age was too old, Mistress Joan?"

"Fourteen, my lord."

He laughed again. "So for five years you have lived alone with a child of thirteen or thereabouts. Were you never afraid for the hoard at your bed-head?"

"So Dave has told you that too?"

At that, perhaps because there was a hint of vexation in my voice, he grew grave on the instant. Pausing, he laid a hand on my arm as my father might have done.

"Mistress Joan, if we are to succeed in what we have in prospect, and for one I don't look on it as a pleasure jaunt, we must believe and trust in each other all we can. I don't blame you that you thought I carried things with too high a hand; it

looked like it. But don't suppose I think little of what John Sharland set himself so doggedly to gather together through so many years. Apart from its value as a man's work it has a value as a man's proof of faith. To me it is evidence that John Sharland believed every word he said to you the night he died, and knowing and loving him as I do, I too believe every word. There, Joan girl, there, don't cry, or I shall think myself too rough even to play cabin-boy."

And crying I was. Why? Why do we women cry? We cry if we're happy, we cry if we're miserable, we cry in hope, we cry in despair, we cry if we lose, we cry if we gain, we cry at goodness, we cry at evil. I think the blending of several of these went to the making of the tears—that my father should be so remembered, that my lord should be so generously kind, that I should have been such a fool as to doubt him, and perhaps the tears when we are fools are the commonest of all.

"Indeed, my lord, it is true every word of it," I managed to say at last, "and though what I have is so little it will help!"

"We'll see about that," he answered.

When presently I had sent Nan flying on her errand I found myself in a difficulty.

"My lord," I said, "it's bleak March weather and there's no fire except in the kitchen."

"Where better could it be," he answered. "The kitchen? Why, it's the stomach of the house and the one room a man can't do without. We can live without heart, we can live without brains, we see it done every day, but where's the man who can live without his stomach?" Nor would he let me drag in a chair from the still-room, but turning round a bench he pushed it up to the fire, bade me sit down,

sat down himself and pushed out his feet to the heat.

"Now, Joan," he began, "if that twelve-year dragon of yours comes back bid her go and play dolls awhile, for we must talk, and little pitchers had best not have their ears tickled. If I speak jest I mean earnest. Your life and mine may hang on silence. Women commonly take little thought for their own risks, so I'll put it this way—Dave's life's at stake."

"I'll say nothing, my lord."

"No; but we must avoid accidents. Now, to begin—make no mistake, Joan, your Yea or Nay comes first down South, but here at the start we men must judge."

"Meaning you and Dave? I am quite satisfied."

"And Macdonald," he said.

"Why Mr. Macdonald, my lord?" I asked, astonished.

"Mistress Joan, I said a while back that we must trust each other and I'll begin now. You know Mr. Macdonald, you met him five years ago on the road to Whitcroft the night your father died, and have seen him from time to time since."

"I did not know him then, but he was in the blur of a tree and asked his way—"

"To Dunquester. Yes, and the next day you forgot all about him at my request. At present Macdonald, who has since studied theology at St. Omer, is Chaplain at Dunquester, but five years ago—" he paused, then went on slowly, staring into the fire the while, "five years ago there was a price on his head. Many a brave man has died for the Stuarts and more will yet. Do you understand, Mistress Joan?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Well, then," he said briskly, "Macdonald goes

with us. He who fought six years ago is full priest now, but I'm not sure but he'd fight again, so he'll be safest South. Our idea is to lose no time. He and I —he has dispensation and does not dress the cleric— will search out a ship. It comes natural to every Whitcroft man to know something of them, but Macdonald has experience gained—we won't say where. We may try Hull first, then further south if we don't find what we want, but not London. To look out a ship in London might not be wholesome for either of us. Are you still satisfied?"

It was then that shame broke me down and I went near to crying the second time.

"Tell me nothing at all, my lord. Whatever you do will be right."

I think the outburst pleased him. "We'll do our best, be sure of that, but Captain Joan must not be left in the dark. Before I go South I'll order the ship's stores. That's the one thing that troubles me. Whitcroft is a talky place, and we want this kept quiet. Yet I can't bear that our folk should not get a turn out of the spending, and then when old Hawke knows they're for me you can swear there will be no rotten beef or measly pork put aboard, and that's a great matter. Sailormen are like the rest of the world; the kitchen can't be done without, and a contented stomach keeps a sweet temper. I think, Captain Joan, that's all to report to-day." He paused, rubbing his chin meditatively, then suddenly roused, "No! there's one thing more. When we come north again I want you to shift to Dunquester, to Babington's care. Things will move faster then, and it will save much tramping back and forth. It will be your last of The Scaur, Joan woman."

"My last! How so?" It was a gasp rather than a question.

"Because Three Oaks will want you, and after all that will have come and gone, you must be married from Dunquester."

"We can talk of that later," I answered, reddening, and fencing him as I think any maid would.

"Aye," he said, looking at me shrewdly, "there's the treasure to reckon with. Three Oaks may be too small."

That angered me. "Wherever Dave is will be large enough for me," I retorted. "But, my lord, we'll leave Dave's affairs and mine alone, if you please."

"I ask your pardon, Mistress Joan," he answered and rose, "I think there's no more to be said."

"One thing," said I, and ran up stairs. For the second time in a week the hoard was dragged from its hiding place, but this time I did not tumble it out on the table when I returned. "There, my lord," I went on, thrusting the pouch into his hand. "That's what Dave spoke of and I'm right glad to be quit of it."

For a moment he stood weighing it, looking at me vexedly, then pushed it into a big flapped pocket at his hip, where it sank out of sight as if it had no existence.

"John Sharland would wish it. Be it so," he said. "Surely five-and-twenty years of forethought should bring us luck."

CHAPTER IX

WHAT DOES HULL KNOW OF JOHN SHARLAND?

My lord was as good as his word: certainly he wasted no time. By May he had returned and by June I was housed at Dunquester. That of itself set gossip flying, for Whitcroft, as he had said, was a talky place: but Dave knew and approved, so the evil hints with the tongue in the cheek never feesed me. There is no truer saying than, If lying tongues burnt like fire the poor would have charcoal for nothing, and I have long learned that if the apparent truth is a wickedness it is usually half a lie.

At The Scaur, the big room over the byre had been furnished and a man of my lord's choosing installed, with the run of the kitchen. The rest of the old house had been locked up, to be re-opened God alone knew when. For myself, I was received at Dunquester like any other guest and was allotted a room next door to Mistress Babington. I think at first she was inclined to resent that Joan Sharland should be given the freedom of the castle, but that feeling soon wore off. As I have said, she came to love me for my own sake in those days of sorrow five years before, and where that is so there is no room for small resentments.

My lord persisted in keeping up his pleasantry that I was the chief personage of the adventure.

"Captain Joan," he began, after his first courteous

welcome to Dunquester, "I am proud to report that our affairs go well. That we have hired a ship you know: Macdonald and I chose her with an eye to speed and sea-worthiness rather than fighting power."

"Fighting power?" I interjected.

"Well, Mistress Joan, John Sharland did not teach you how to shoot off unoffending finger nails just that you might go a pleasure cruise." But instantly he sobered. "To be peacefully ready for danger never yet created danger, though it has stalled it off many a time. We may never meet trouble at all, but it is well known there is no law South of the line, but the law of a man's fist, and mayhap there'll be a pistol in it. We must be ready. For a month we have lived at Shipping inns where sea-captains foregather, have smoked, and drank our pot of beer rubbing knees and elbows with unhung rogues who would have looted with Drake or fought with Grenville with equal cheerfulness. Using a free purse and keeping silent tongues ourselves we have listened to their talk, and the sum of it all is, the law of nations does not run South of the line. What then? Macdonald and I consulted—"

"But Mr. Macdonald is a priest?"

"Yes, and truly. But the true priest is a priest of the heart who is not afraid to be human with common men when to be human is no sin. That is Macdonald. He takes his tobacco and wine with me here like any other gentleman, because they are God's creatures with no harm in either unless illtreated, then why not with me in a pot house when there's a good end to be gained? And such an end—the saving, it may be, of all our lives. We consulted, I say, and decided that between guns and heels we would choose heels, not altogether forgetting the guns. So, as I said at the first, we chose the *Elizabeth Regina* with an eye

to speed. The name may or may not be good Latin but its rare good English. We have her hired for a year—"

"A year!" I interrupted. It was only by interruptions that I got in a word at all. It was plain to me that my lord was much keener set on the South Adventure than I was. "But surely in three months' time we shall be back in Whitcroft again?"

"Not in three months, that's certain," he answered decisively, "and the difference in hire between six months and a year was so small that I closed with the longer period to avoid a possible haggle over broken time at the end. If she's fast—and there we earwigged the opinions of those who could judge but who had no interest in the deal—she's strong with a high poop to give us head-room." We were in Dunquester hall at the time and he looked up and laughed. Though a June sun burned outside, the grey stone roof looked dim, it was so high-pitched. "'Twill be a change, Mistress Joan, and 'tis change that spices life, though little enough I've known of it. Plain beef and bread and beer have been my portion so far. Now—but we'll see. A great poop she has, and I am having the cabins refitted to suit our wants."

"And what is my rating to be?"

At the question we both turned, and if the memory of a stretch of moonlit road instantly came back to me, it was a trick of instinct and no true recognition.

The voice was more familiar than the man. But instinct was justified, helped perhaps by occasional glimpses from a distance. For reasons of his own, Father Macdonald rarely quitted Dunquester demesne.

"Captain Joan, this is Father Macdonald. Were you of my creed I would say his rating would be pilot. But since that can't be, what's your desire, Macdonald?"

"Rate me as friend and I'm content," he answered coming forward, his hand outstretched. "Suppose, Mistress Sharland, that we both so rate each other in honour of our five-year-old acquaintance?"

All these speeches confused me and made me look, I am sure, the fool I felt. But I took and held his hand as I answered,

"My father promised me one friend that night and now I have three, but how to say thanks to them is beyond me."

"Don't you know that friendship never asks thanks?" he replied, then added, "and commonly gets as little as it asks. But it ill becomes me to be cynical who owe, perhaps, a life to friendship. Have you told Mistress Sharland that we hope to sail this month?"

My lord turned to me, "Yes, if Scotton can be ready."

"Who is Scotton?" I asked.

"The *Regina's* Sailing Master under Captain Joan. He is to engage the two mates and the ship's crew, oversee the changes we have ordered and bring her north to Whitcroft. The owners recommended him, and as Mr. Macdonald has had dealings with them before we don't doubt the recommendation is good. Can you be ready before the month's end, Mistress Joan?"

With that he went into a list of necessities for me to lay in, that took my breath away by its length; this because of the tropic heat, that because of the wind and rain and wash a-board, this other because of the winter's cold of the return, nor would he listen to any cutting down of the items.

"Babington has her orders, and the three hundred guineas are not all spent," he said in a tone that put an end to argument. "If you can be self-willed so

can I; these things you must have," and God knows the day came when I needed them and blessed his obstinacy—foresight I cannot call it, since no man's wit could have foreseen the biting necessity.

Dave came to see me next day. Of late he had grown very silent and full of broodings, as if some new trouble weighed heavily on his mind. That he loathed the whole enterprise I knew, and it grieved me to grieve him, but he had grown resigned, so it was not the adventure that clouded him. When I told him of all my lord had said the truth came out.

"Joan, lass," he began, but stopped short. Then with a plain effort he forced himself to continue. "It's not easy to speak of, least of all to you, but if you must go this—this damnable voyage would you not be safer—I mean you'll be one woman among a vile crew of unhung rogues—my lord's words, Joan—and—and—what do you say to going as a man yourself?"

"A man, Dave?" It was slow-witted of me, but at first I did not catch his meaning.

"Yes; you are big and strong, and—and—don't you see what I mean?"

I did then, and went hot and cold at the thought: yet I contrived to control my voice and answer levelly enough.

"Yes, Dave, I understand, but I think not. For a man aboard ship there will be ugly sights hard to avoid, and if I was found out—it's ten chances to one, or more, that I would be—they might think me a light woman and my plight would be worse than ever. No, I'll go as a woman, go as I am, and trust the power of God and decency of man to hold me safe." Then, after a moment of silence, I slipped a hand into his, "And there will always be you, Dave."

"Me!" he said with a groan that shook my heart. "If these two fail you what can I do? It's damnable, Joan, that's what it is, downright damnable."

Poor Dave, I don't believe women know one half that men suffer on their account. We can weep and moan and make lament with many words, while men can only grit their teeth and bear their pain in silence like the dumb beasts, or else cry out that it's damnable and leave their meaning to our understanding. But that Dave should have had such a thought at all showed me how greatly he feared on my behalf.

Because of that long list of my lord's these were busy days, and I never saw any woman so enjoy herself as did Mistress Babington. My lord being unmarried little of woman's gear came into Dunquester, of still less had she had the buying, but now the hunger of her soul feasted. And with us the love of handling stuffs and fal-lals, of choosing or rejecting, of matching and contrasting—to leave aside the supreme joy of spending—is a hunger and a crave akin to starvation. Men know nothing of its fierce gladness and lose much by their ignorance. That the choosing and the spending were vicarious left the joy almost untouched; through these days Mistress Babington was in paradise.

Now, from the day that my lord had ordered the ship's stores from old Hawke—he was Mayor at the time as well as ship's-chandler—Whitcroft's loose tongues never ceased wagging in speculation. It is always so in fussy little towns where one's neighbour's business is more important than one's own and has the zest of novelty. Next, to whet speculation yet keener, followed my lord's absence south, my lord who never before had left Dunquester for so long. It was known he had gone to Hull, and Whitcroft

hated and was jealous of Hull, as a terrier puppy just feeling the good of life can be jealous of a mastiff. Then came Mistress Babington's purchases, and of the construction put upon it all we soon had proof.

Supper was ended and I about to retire to Mistress Babington's room to fence the good soul's questions for the hundredth time and talk over the day's buying, when Farland announced that a sea-faring man from Whitcroft was waiting to see my lord.

"Then he may wait; or, rather, he may go back to Whitcroft, for I'll see no man to-night," was the answer.

"I told him so, my lord," said Farland, "but he won't take no. He says it is ordained that your lordship will see him to-night and that so you will."

"That settles it, Dunquester," said Mr. Macdonald, laughing at my lord's puzzled face. "In this life or the next there is no getting away from what's ordained. Come, Mistress Sharland, let us all go and see the consummation of that which was foreknown before the foundation of the world."

"What did he mean?" I whispered as we left the room.

"I'll tell you better when I have seen and heard him," answered he.

It was not far from Midsummer Eve and daylight died so grudgingly that the hall was still well-lit, late though the hour was. At the further end, his back to the door and the light, stood the sailor, tall and spare, his hands behind his back, his shoulders squared, his head thrown up, his eyes fixed upon nothing six feet above our heads. Because of the shadow I could not see his face distinctly, but my heart went out to him for two reasons—his long hair was silvered and his threadbare clothing was clean and

patched as I, who do not love seamstress work, could never have patched it.

My lord went forward leisurely: Mr. Macdonald and I being behind; I suppose I ought to say Father Macdonald, but his dress was not that of a cleric, and he so rarely thrust the priest into our face that I forget.

"Well, my man, what do you want at this time o' night?"

His hands still behind his back, he ducked his head stiffly, but I could see that his eyes took us all in at a glance.

"Service, your worship."

"Service? But I have servants enough."

He coughed, as if about to clear his throat, looked about him a moment, picked a rag out of a pocket spat into it and thrust it back again.

"Aboard ship, your worship."

That set my lord on a dilemma; to deny would be the lie inferential, and yet he had no wish to acknowledge.

He fenced the difficulty.

"Sea service? You'll find that at Whitcroft."

"I'm sick of coasting, your worship. Barging coal and bricks to mucky little ports is no true sailor man's work. It's blue water I want."

"Then try Hull."

"They say I'm too old, your worship."

"How old are you?"

He paused a moment, "I don't rightly know, but I was twenty-four when I sailed with Captain Cook from Virginia in '83."

"Sailed where?"

"South, your worship, an' it's sure ordained that I'm to warm my bones once again before I die. It's South I want to go, and so I come to you."

"Why to me?"

Again he looked about him, first to one side, then to the other, then to the roof, diving his hand into the same pocket as before, but this time he brought it out empty. My belief was that he was playing for time to think before answering.

"It's Whitcroft's story that your worship's going South. There's the ship's stores to show for it and—" here he ducked his head at me—"the lady's buyings at the back of them. It's the talk of the town that young madam's for the South, and 'tis said that Mr. John Sharland was a sailor-man South in his youth."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Nothin', your worship, nothin' at all," he replied hastily, "but sometimes 'tis in the blood."

"And you are no Whitcroft man?"

Once more there was the pause, the looking on all sides, the uneasy groping in the pocket, before he answered.

"Not just Whitcroft, your worship, but I've been back and forth these ten years, since they said I grew too old for blue water," he added bitterly.

"Well, my man, the ship's crew is made up."

"Your worship, your worship, don't say that," he broke out, almost with a wail in his voice. "There's alwads room for one more aboard ship. And if I'm older than some I've the knowledge of age. There's nothing I can't turn my hand to. I can mend a sail, stand my trick at the wheel, rig a spar, splice a rope, patch a ship's boat, turn cook if need be, and there's not a rock or reef or yard of coast down South I don't know as well as I know the ledges round Filey. It's my last chance, and it's sure ordained I'll go South before I die. Your worship—Madam—speak

for me—Madam, speak for the old sailor's last chance."

But it was Father Macdonald who spoke. Joining my lord he whispered in his ear, and the two spoke apart for a moment. What he urged I could only guess from the result.

"What is your name?"

"Ezra Plowden, your worships both."

"Where do you come from?"

Yet again he looked about him before answering, but this time it seemed to me that his glance swept us all as at the first.

"I'll tell you no lie. I tramped from Hull on the chance."

"Did you apply to Captain Scotton?"

"Of what use, being old? And if the Captain had once said no, and turned me down, your worship would never have said yes."

"That's true," answered my lord. "And you know the coast South of the line?"

"South of the line!" he repeated eagerly, with a little alert upward tilt of the head. "As a man knows his empty pocket. Just name the spot, your worship, and I'll prove it to you."

It was then that I first truly realised my father's wisdom in compelling me to silence, for I have not a doubt but that my lord, had he but known, would have taken Ezra Plowden at his word, and warmly as my heart went out to the old man, so carefully neat even in his poverty, so bitter of heart at the contempt showered upon his age, I knew it would be unwise of my lord to be too precise. As it was his ignorance warned him that he had already gone too far.

"South or North of the line matters nothing," he said curtly. "If Captain Scotton can find room for

you I'll take you. If it's so ordained, go you must; but don't forget, my man, on board ship I do my own ordaining."

For answer he ducked his head as he had done at our coming.

"I'll be aboard, your worships both," was all he said, and was gone.

"It's ordained that he will be useful," said my lord with a laugh. "Scotton would be a fool not to take him. What's troubling you, Macdonald?"

"This," he answered, "What does Hull know of John Sharland? Why should Hull know anything of him at all, and why join his name with the South Adventure?"

CHAPTER X

THE *ELIZABETH REGINA*

FOUR days later, when the *Elizabeth Regina* rounded the headland that shelters Whitcroft bay from the South-East, I think there was almost more commotion in the town than at Dunquester. For one thing, she was the biggest ship by many tons that had ever entered the port; for another, that my lord had chartered her, and that she was bound for none knew where filled every man's mouth with speculation. Never had there been such scope for rumour to romance, and being a woman she availed herself finely of her opportunity, setting a dozen stories afloat. That which gained most credence was that we were to found a new Colony in some delectable land my father had discovered; though what use one woman could be in assuring such a Colony I leave to those who understand such things.

When I say the *Elizabeth Regina* was the biggest ship by many tons that ever made the port I do not mean that she was of any great size. Most things in this life are comparative and but small vessels, judged as the great world judges, had as yet made entry at Whitcroft which, after all, was a port of my lord's creating. But when I saw her—which I did that very day in company with my lord, Father Macdonald, Dave and young Hal, who had been sent for from Three Oaks—I thought her the most beautiful creature

that ever sat the waters and fit for the King's Navy itself. Also, she was of this bigness that she could not come alongside the new stone quay, not even at high tide, and the five of us had to put off in a boat to where she lay at anchor. Indeed, I may say six, for Ezra Plowden was in waiting at the quay side and we took him with us. He held a lean canvas bag between his knees, and remembering my father's three hundred guineas I thought how a man may toil all his life and have but little to show at the end of it.

But the excitement of it all left me little time for moralizing. The quay behind was thronged with Whitcroft folk, the barque before seemed no less thronged, with every sailor clustering at the bulwarks straining over one another's backs, as Dave said afterwards, like rats in a pit, and between, and round the *Regina*, a dozen boats plying or lying on their oars, the air one buzz of talk all the time. My heart, I know, went thirteen to the dozen as we crossed the three hundred yards of water, and of all in the boat only Dave sat dour and downcast.

A rope ladder hung over the *Regina's* side. My lord mounted first, I followed with young Hal scrambling after me, almost on my skirts in his eagerness. Giving me both hands, my lord swung me down to the deck and turned to the nearest of the group of three or four who stood in a little open space apart from the rest.

"Come aboard, Captain Scotton!" he said gaily. "Mistress Sharland, I present to you Captain Scotton, who will have all our lives in charge and who, I know, is worthy of the trust. Scotton, Mistress Sharland is our chief in command in all things save the sailing of the vessel."

What he said in answer I do not know, or whether he said anything at all, for my head was all one con-

fusion, and though my eyes were busier than my ears I saw almost as little as I heard. I only knew that Captain Scotton bowed with a ducked head that so reminded me of Ezra Plowden that I almost laughed. I think my lord noted my confusion, for he went on, with hardly a break,

"What weather have you had coming north, and what's your verdict on the *Regina*?"

"There was nothing to test her, but I think she'll move when pushed," was the answer, and somehow the harsh, grating voice of the man brought me to myself, and I began, as they say of children, to take notice.

Beside me stood Captain Scotton, his hard red face framed in grizzled, half trimmed hair that over-ran chin, mouth and cheeks in a tangle, almost to the near-set small, hard eyes. He was small-built, small limbed, but with a dogged square jaw hidden away in the tousled hair. His age I guessed at round about fifty. Beyond him were the younger men, one a boy hardly into his twenties; later I came to know them as Mr. Cuthbert and Mr. Stenson, the mates of the *Regina*, and Mr. Eliot the ship's surgeon.

They, as I have said, stood a group apart, a group within a group, for from right and left the ship's company stared their hardest at us, mostly silent but with sundry nudgings and whisperings. An ill-conditioned, unkempt, hard-bitten crew they seemed, and I saw my lord's forehead wrinkle as he looked them over. For my part, they reminded me in some left-handed way of Ezra Plowden, but when I searched for him I could not find him, though the boat was empty of all but the rowers, whom Captain Scotton would in no wise allow to come on deck.

"We're clear of the drink, thank God, and we'll stay clear," he said.

That nettled my lord. "They are Whitcroft men and I pledge my word there will be nothing of that."

"Then, with respect, you pledge your word to what you know nothing about," he answered surlily. "Mr. Cuthbert, stand by the ladder and if one of these dough-faced longshoremen sets foot on it sling him into the sea and be damned to him." As he ended he looked round him with a grunting snort, his head bristling, then, bethinking himself, doubtless, that he had been more vigorous and independent than polite he added by way of handsome apology, "Two days' hell's enough, my lord, an' by your leave we'll take no risks. Now would young Madam like to go below?"

But as we went towards the poop I checked myself with a cry of dismay at sight of a great cannon that half blocked the way. Shrouded out of sight though it was in tarpaulin, there was no mistaking its shape.

"Why, Mistress Joan," said my lord, "I told you that we trusted to our heels, but not altogether. There are seven of these persuaders to peace abroad, two at each side, one at the bow and two to grin farewell over the stern. Where is your powder and ball stowed, Scotton?"

"In the lazareet aft," he rumbled. "The muskets, cutlasses and pikes are under our hand in the cabin."

"But are all these needed?" I asked, and I suppose I looked at Captain Scotton as I spoke.

"That depends where we are going, young lady," he answered, staring at me hard. "Here am I, captain of the ship, and I know no more than the cabin-boy. You may say, what's that to me, I'm paid. Well and good, so I am, but don't ask me what's needful and what isn't, for I don't know. I do as I'm told. Know! Why," and he snorted again. "I don't even know what course I'll lay. A sweet

jest they made of me in Hull—Tom Scotton sailin' for he don't know where, like a petticoated three-year-old in leading-strings."

It was my lord who answered. "You will know that the day we have our stores on board. How long will that be?"

"Three days, I suppose, in this footy, God-forsaken undredged mudhole."

That vexed my lord, for he had made Whitcroft what it was, nursing it from a paltry fishing village into the beginning of a seaport, and no man likes to hear his creation cried down in contempt. Yet, vexed though he was he kept his temper, which was more than I could have done.

"The sooner the better," was all he said.

We were in the cabin by this time, having entered by a door in the break of the poop. This gave upon a passage which led between sleeping-berths to the main cuddy. There with his back to the table that ran its width from port to port Captain Scotton turned and faced us, his fists on his hips.

"That at least's a true word. There has been a damned sight too much talk about this ship—I beg the lady's pardon if I say what's in my mind just as it lays in my mind; I mean no offence—and the talk's been all on one side, for what could I answer them back when they jeered me? An' here's another thing never thought of—how can a man count on a decent crew when they don't know where they're bound? It's not in nature. I'll not say there're not sailors. Oh, yes! they're sailors all right, but to fill up at all I've had to ship some of the da—— there! it's no use talking. The thing's done."

"Captain Scotton," said my lord in his grandest manner. "If you are not content it will be a pleasure to make some other arrangement."

"And if I hadn't a wife at Kingston who has spent some of the advance you made me I would jump at the chance. Whoever wants the billet may have it for me! But I've said my say, and you know my mind. That's Tom Scotton, to speak his mind. Now, Mistress Sharland, what do you think of your quarters that will be?"

That was a question hard to answer. To the healthy mind novelty is always interesting, mostly welcome, and so far as what I saw was new I drank it all in eagerly, but not without dismay and disappointment. The light was grey and dismal, the air smelt foul, with the mingling of such evil odours as I had never imagined, the deck overhead seemed near enough to close in and crush me: nowhere was there the free space and clean breath I had known and drawn all my life.

The cabin was T—shaped, the shank running to the stem with enclosed sleeping-berths at either side. Facing this shank, but not exactly opposite, was the narrow passage to the deck, also with sleeping-berths to right and left. Where the head of the T joined the stem there was a square skylight with, just aft of it, the shaft of a mast half-blocking the space between the berths: yet further aft a ladder rose through a hatch to the poop deck. Above the table hung two brass lamps, very dirty. Against the sheathing of the berths, facing towards the table, were the muskets, pikes and cutlasses Captain Scotton had spoken of, all held secure from tampering by stout wooden bars strongly padlocked.

Perhaps it was the sight of these that shaped my thought. God send us all safe home! But I left it unsaid, and instead answered something trite and foolish. Had I spoken out Dave, late in the day though it was, would have been swift to urge, why

go at all? And go I would, though I had none of my lord's keenness. Except Hal, he was the youngest of us all in his eagerness: indeed, in the end, I questioned which was the more boyish of the two, and it vexed me that I could not enter into the zest wherewith he followed Captain Scotton's explanations. Had I been wiser I would have envied him even more than I was vexed with myself, for few dispositions are more to be desired than the mind of a man who understands coupled to the heart of a boy who enjoys.

Poor Dave—it was always poor Dave these days—followed with the dejection of a hound out of favour. Nor did he brighten at all when I held back as the others clustered round the lazaretto-opening between the mast and the after stairway, and slipped my hand into his, whispering,

"We'll have all our life after, Dave dear."

"Aye, God grant it, Joan lass," he answered, gripping me hard, "but it's now I want it, not after, and who knows if there'll be an after at all? Ingots of gold indeed! In your heart, now, do you think they're worth all this?"

I don't know what I might have answered but I saw a shadow move on the partition between me and the cabin door, and there was Ezra Plowden waiting behind the mast for my lord to make his peace with the captain. When his eye caught mine he came forward at once with his old stiff dip of the head.

"You'll speak for me," he whispered. "You'll speak for the old man? You'll tell him there's nothin' I can't do aboard ship, nothin' I can't turn my hand to—nothin'! And ordained it is—it surely is, or why would I be so far on the way?"

And perhaps he was right, for, as it turned out, there was no need for persuasion. Captain Scotton listened with a wooden face until my lord ended,

then vented that grunting snort I was beginning to know.

"One waster more or less makes no odds. Get forrad, my man, but carry this with ye—if ever I find you here again except on a ship's errand you'll wish yourself back in whatever lousy dog-hole y've come from. Now then, no talk, but be off with y'e."

Nor did Plowden reply with so much as a thank'ee. Doubtless he understood Scotton's temper better than we did. His only answer was his familiar duck, and we all stood looking after him in silence until he had disappeared, then,

"With your leave, Mistress Joan, we have seen enough for to-day," said my lord, and, in the silence of offence he led the way to where Mr. Cuthbert kept guard over the ladder. "Catlett, do you go first," he went on curtly. Next he handed me up a four-step mount which had been rigged for my use, and followed last of all, but paused astride of the bulwarks, one foot within and one without the *Regina*. "In three days, then?" he demanded.

"How can I say for certain?" I could not see him, but Captain Scotton's tone was apologetic. "See here, my lord, I'll do my best, but it depends on that nip-cheese thief ashore—"

But my lord cut him short.

"Mr. Hawke will hold to his word, see that you hold to yours," he interrupted, and climbed down the ladder. Not even when a score or more of the sailors, led by Ezra Plowden, sprang into the rigging and cheered did his face clear. Standing up in the boat he waved his hat in formal acknowledgment, a pillar of stern gravity. Nor, till the coach was midway to Dunquester did he break the silence.

"Captain Scotton may be all your friends say, Macdonald, a fine sailor and an honest man, but one

thing's sure—some Whitcroft lads will sail with the rest of us, and Scotton may like it or leave it as he pleases."

And so it was, nor did I ever hear that Captain Scotton objected.

CHAPTER XI

AN EMBARGO THAT FAILED

MR. HAWKE was, as I have said, Mayor of Whitcroft, but in the end it looked as if the sailing of the *Elizabeth Regina* would depend on the goodwill of greater than he.

Two days had passed, our baggage had all been sent leisurely on board, Hal was in bed, Dave and Father Macdonald trying over sundry of the Dunquester pistols—whereof the cleric knew more than the layman—and I was sitting with my lord in that room where Dave had found him drinking punch three months before, when Farland announced that his worship, the Mayor, was in waiting.

"Did he bid you say, his worship, the Mayor?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then show his worship, the Mayor, here." But as Farland closed the door he turned to me, "Joan, there's a hitch, as sure as you live there's a hitch. It's not like Hawke, plain, honest Peter Hawke, ship's chandler, to come to Dunquester with his worship, the Mayor, in his mouth."

I had no time to answer; Farland was already back with Mr. Hawke at his heels. Being Whitcroft-bred naturally I knew Mr. Hawke, a shrivelled weed of a man with a shrewd face and keen eyes younger than his years if I can so express it. When you see that in a man it is a sign that age has not dulled the

brain experience has taught. Since I could remember him he had never changed the style or colour of his clothing and his old-fashioned snuff-coloured suit was as well known in Whitcroft as the spire of the Parish Church. It was said by some that his hard-driven bargains had need of watching; my lord, I know, trusted him.

As Farland stood aside his worship, with a nice discrimination of our respective importance, bowed thrice to my lord and once to me, his hat pushed high up under his left arm, but until the door was shut no one spoke, then,

"Which do I receive," said my lord, "his worship, the Mayor, or Peter Hawke, an old friend to Dunquester?"

"Each in turn, my lord, and the victualler to the *Elizabeth Regina* as well. With your leave we'll take the last first."

"Good. There's a chair there by Mistress Sharland."

"With your leave again, my lord, I'll stand." He paused, a disapproving eye on me, then went on bluntly, "My lord, women-folk are best out of men's business."

My lord laid a touch upon my shoulder. "Don't rise, Joan. I guarantee Mistress Sharland; go on, Hawke."

But he was still uneasy. "It touches others."

"I guarantee Mistress Sharland as myself. Is that enough?"

"Well, my lord, the *Elizabeth Regina's* stores are all aboard."

"Already? But you had to-morrow to finish?"

"It suited better to work double tides and end it," he answered. Again he paused, then jerked out "As Mayor of Whitcroft, my lord, it's my duty to tell you there's an embargo laid on the ship."

"An embargo?" When Peter Hawke had refused to sit my lord also kept his feet, standing by the table; now he leaned forward across it. "An embargo? For what reason, Mr. Mayor?"

"The order's from London. They gave no reason: just that the *Elizabeth Regina* must not sail without a Government permit.

"But, Hawke, that's nonsense, rank nonsense. Why, man, I made Whitcroft; it's as much mine as Dunquester and yet you say I must not sail out of it! You'll tell me next I must not drive out of Dunquester in my own hired coach without leave! It's monstrous! The embargo was never laid against me."

"Not against you, my lord, against the ship. Your name is not mentioned nor any other, but the order's clear. I am a loyal man, my lord, and the Government—"

"I am as loyal as you, sir, but loyal though I am, damn the Government. There is such a thing as being too much governed. God bless the king with all my heart, but I'm not bound to love every man who deceives the king and blinds the country for the sake of office. And I don't love them and they know it. My name may not be mentioned, but they will grant me no permit. See here, Mr. Mayor, this embargo is to prevent privateering that's more than half pirating, or else perhaps the sapient fools who flourish the king's authority in London imagine a worse suspicion they dare not hint. I'm Whitcroft born and bred, you know me as you know your own tides, I give you my word of honour there is nothing of that sort, nothing—nothing. Supposing—"

"Suppose nothing, my lord. Here's how it stands. The order came to-day, and it was my duty to tell you. Well, I've told you, but the loading of stores was not forbidden and the stores are aboard. To-

morrow there are to be watchers from Hull, for how could I keep a troop on the quay-side day and night? Two men to look out is the best I can do, and it's my duty to the Government." Then, looking hard at the empty square of the hearth, he added reflectively, "There'll be about two feet of water at the near end of the quay-wall at one in the morning. I don't know a man in Whitcroft who wouldn't be proud to take a soaking for your lordship."

There was a moment's silence, then my lord fished a big double-ended purse out of his breeches pocket. Counting out ten guineas he pushed them across the table.

"I'm sorry the poor fellows should lose their rest on my account. Give them that, Hawke, as you pass in."

"By your leave, no, my lord." His Worship, the Mayor, his eyes twinkling, gathered up the coins slowly as he spoke. "Not to-night. That might smell of bribery. But to-morrow, if their clothes were spoilt by misadventure no one could wish to see them losers. I think, my lord, I've done my duty—by the Government," he added.

Without a word said my lord held out his hand, and as the two men stood in grips I could see that Peter Hawke asked no other answer and no better reward; a lesser man than Lord Dunquester would have suspected he had hastened the stores on board for his own profit, and the driver of hard bargains relished the unspoken trust. But as my lord was showing him to the door a thought struck him.

"The embargo? It was laid on the ship. Have you told Scotton?

"Yes, my lord, but Mistress Sharland being present I will not repeat his answer," and both laughed, then Hawke added, "I also told him the

depth of water at the quay wall," and they laughed again.

In three minutes my lord was back, whistling like a schoolboy. If his many friends had a fault to find with him I think it would be that he lacked energy—force, and was too much inclined to stand aside idle while the stream of vital action roared past him. But now all that was changed.

"Joan, girl, there will be no sleep for you to-night! Embargo me, would they? That's the way Governments make rebels. It's true I am of the old faith both in politics and religion, but the King who will not show himself kingly is no king for me. These things bite deeper into the blood than politics. They are of the fundamentals, as religion is, and where there can be no reverence there can be no faith. King George? I think George does the best they'll let him. It's Governments, not Kings, that make men rebels, and bring the crown into disrepute, playing false to both crown and people for the sake of office. Did you hear old Hawke? I've done my duty! said he. Yes, but he meant his duty to Dunquester. Embargo me, would they? They've put the clock on half a day, that's all. I wish Catlett would leave the boy at home, but since he will not, wake him at twelve and we'll make a moonlight flitting." And that, leaving unnecessary intermediaries and detail of arrangements aside, is exactly what we did.

Truly it was like a royal progress, and I, Joan Sharland, the farmer lass from the plough-tail, should have been a proud woman, seated in the Dunquester coach with my lord by my side, and nearly a score of Dunquester men as a bodyguard in advance. But memory of how, just five years before and at such a time of night, I had raced down the road to see if the tide still made, so filled my thoughts that there

was no place left for pride. Then there came a turn of the road, and the old house I loved showed through the gloom, and I could have wept at leaving it; had I foreseen all that was to come and the changes which must follow I would have wept, and that bitterly, yet, for myself, I would not have turned back. What was laid upon me to do I would do.

Progress was slow, since we could drive no faster than a foot's-pace. No one spoke. Even Hal, simmering with a boy's excitement, was awed to silence by the stillness of the night. Nor was there any relief to the tension when we rocked and rumbled over Whitcroft's cobbles. Once I had seen the old town as it lay asleep, but never before had I entered it. Now it seemed not asleep but dead, and our shameless iron rattle a profanation of its peace.

Presently we lurched, swinging to the right, then to the left, and all at once the sea broke crisply at our side with the new quay looming ahead, a grey bulk shadowy through the grey gloom. Far out, guessed at rather than visible, lay the *Elizabeth Regina*, one light shining from her like a remote star. The hour, no doubt by a coincidence, was not far from that named by Mr. Hawke.

Leaning from the coach my lord called out, "Remember, lads, do nothing without orders," and so, still slowly, we drove to the quay-head. Here there was a halt. Out from the shadow of a shed two men came forward, and my lord, alighting, went to meet them, leaving the coach door open, so that I had a clear view of all that followed.

"If you're for the *Elizabeth Regina* you can't pass," said the foremost, civilly. Dunquester's men had drawn aside in a bunch, and these two and my lord stood between them and the harbour edge of the quay wall.

"Hey? What's that? Not pass?" said my lord. "But you know me, don't you?"

"Yes, my lord, but his worship's orders were strict. 'Let no one pass for the *Regina*,' said he, 'no one at all.'"

"Come, now," went on my lord, producing a guinea, "just to drink Mistress Sharland's health and safe return. It's her venture, you know, not mine."

The light was fair, and I saw the fellow grin as he caught sight of the glint of the coin; but his tone, always civil, showed no weakening.

"Orders are orders, my lord, and you can't pass, not even though there's a boat from the ship waiting at the steps beyond," and he jerked his thumb backwards across his shoulder.

"A boat waiting from the ship, is there?" Turning, my lord glanced down the face of the wall, measuring the drop and the depth of water at its foot. I knew the tides as well as any, and Mr. Hawke was right—the depth would be about two feet as he said, enough to break a man's fall, but not enough to do him hurt. "And I can't pass, can't I? We'll see about that. Over with them, lads, but break no bones. Gently there, gently—clear of the wall—don't struggle, you fools! There! two feet of June sea water never hurt a Whitcroft man yet! My compliments to his worship: he has carried out his orders and you yours, but tell him Lord Dunquester must be free of his own quay."

For a moment he stood peering down to make sure there was no tragic hitch in the comedy, then, assured by the splashing, he signed for the coach to move forward.

But no longer in silence. Behind, from the lanes and alleys that abut on the pier head, came a clatter

of heavy boots on the cobbles, a clatter that sounded thunderous in the dead quiet of the night. But when my lord turned to face, as he thought, the substance of the shadowy resistance he had dropped seaward, he was met by a roaring cheer that drew the tears to my eyes.

"Hurrah for Dunquester! Hurrah! hurrah! God save his lordship! Hurrah! hurrah! Send 'ee safe back, my lord. We'd ha' drowned 'em outright for 'ee, but they meant no harm. Another cheer for Dunquester! Shout like the divil, my sons. Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

My lord's heart must have glowed at the roar that went up. What greater gladness, what greater reward can life bring than the outspoken, ungrudged love and goodwill of one's own people, the folk with whom one's life has been spent, for whom that life has been given? From where he stood by the open coach door he held up his hand for silence.

"God bless you for this, lads," he called out. "I had no thought of seeing a friendly face to-night but they can't put an embargo on Whitcroft's love! It will out in spite of Governments. God send us all safe home—I echo that! Now, one cheer with a will—success to Mistress Sharland!" And this time I wept outright at the shout. It was not for my sake, I knew—it was for my lord's. I was only Joan Sharland of The Scaur, but I'd have been a stone indeed if the heartiness of it had not moved me.

Half Whitcroft thronged the quay; I think only the bairns were a-bed that night. The boat was in waiting, with Mr. Cuthbert in command, but it took us ten full minutes to clear the steps, and I know my fingers tingled from the unconscious vigour of the many farewells. Hal, to his bitter resentment, was kissed a dozen times. But at length we pushed off,

and thence, as we rowed slowly through the dark to the single star beacon of the *Elizabeth Regina*, a full-throated music of loving good-byes went with us.

This time a better ladder had been rigged without and within. By the help of a hand on Dave's shoulder I climbed on board comfortably enough, to find Captain Scotton and what seemed the whole ship's company gathered in waiting; nor were my feet well planted on the deck before he began bellowing orders. Instantly a shrill whistle piped, and almost instantly there came the pad, pad of naked feet, the clack of a capstan, the roar of a sea chanty, and the groan of the hawser straining grudgingly through the hawse-holes. Almost instantly, too, the loom of the land swung round, and before Father Macdonald could follow the rest up the ladder I was conscious of new sounds—the soft plash of tiny waves and the clucking of water sucking past the *Regina's* hull. We were already in motion.

Afterwards Captain Scotton explained that the anchor had been kept hove short to meet the falling tide; two Whitcroft boats were in readiness to pull our head to sea and an off-shore wind in the foresail did the rest.

From the quay there came a last roar in farewell, from the ship's company a hoarse shout in reply, and my lord at my elbow, turning to me, all shivering with emotion, said.

"I think we have heard the last of the embargo, Joan girl."

And thus, with the voice of goodwill in our ears and an off-shore wind filling the sails, a Wind of God my father would have called it, the *Elizabeth Regina* went out with the tide.

CHAPTER XII

I GROW AFRAID

WHEN Ezra Plowden said there was nothing he could not turn his hand to aboard ship he spoke surely for all blue-water sailor-men. That night, or rather that morning, for it must have been hard on three o'clock when I went below, I found my sleeping berth as trimly neat as any woman could have prepared it. And my lord was wrong when he had said there would be no sleep for me. Sleep came late, but I slept at last and awoke at the bidding of out of place, familiar noises: awoke in terror at my cramping, white-painted walls, and the planking with its straight, caulked lines hardly arm's-length overhead.

Then I remembered where I was, and dressing quietly in a fever of excitement found Mr. Stenson at the cabin table finishing his breakfast. It was the clatter of his knife and fork that had roused me. The ports at each side, the skylight overhead, the door at his back and the hatch to the poop deck were all open and the air tasted cool, fresh, and sweet, vastly different from my recollection of three days before. At sight of me he rose so hastily that he nearly upset his tankard of ale, and his face grew very red as he caught the boy who served him grinning at his awkwardness; yet what was he himself but a boy, though third in command on the *Regina?*

He told me that we were off Flamborough Head, that the wind had fallen to a flat calm, that the sea was smooth as a pond; then he sent the boy for some breakfast for me, asked me how I had slept, said it was his watch below and hoped that I would excuse him—all in a breath. Nor did he wait for an answer as he fled in confusion, scared by a petticoat! Yet it was not long before I saw him among men almost twice his age, ordering, directing, controlling, with an assurance of knowledge and terse strength of language which were alike astonishing.

Surely the Lord God, who does all things well, did well by our English people when He set us apart in the midst of the seas. I do not now mean because of the defence of the seas which, at the best, is no more a defence than English ships and sailors make it, but of the need which He made that to thrive at all we should put out on His waters, learn hardihood thereby, make them our friends and see their beauty. Well as I knew the Whitcroft tides and the long-shore moods of the sea, it was the first time I had ever seen the waters from the broad face of the waters, the first time I had ever viewed land afar off with the shifting, dimpled stretch of sea between, the first time I had ever tasted the beauty and fascination of deck and canvas, of mast, spar and cordage.

Dave and Hal were not on the poop. Afterwards I found they were making themselves free of the ship, as Mr. Cuthbert called it; that is, probing and searching into all manner of places strange to them, and before long I saw Hal climbing, monkey-like, up the rigging. It was my lord who first discovered I was on deck. He and Father Macdonald were leaning against one of the big, tarpaulin covered swivel guns which thrust their muzzles over the taffrail. Further forward, abreast of the mizzen

mast, stood Captain Scotton, gazing up into the net of ropes, his hand upon a stay.

With a cheery wave of his hand Lord Dunquester came to meet me.

"Good-morrow, Captain Joan," cried he, "you were never more welcome. We did not wish to break your sleep, but here's Scotton fretting his heart out for you to lay the course."

"As we go," I answered. "Straight down channel."

At the sound of my voice Captain Scotton turned. What could be seen of his face for growth of hair was redder than ever, perhaps whipped by the wind that had risen afresh in the last half-hour.

"Aye," he growled, "that's all very fine, but we must know where we're bound."

"That's easily told. We are bound—" Then I paused, moved by the same impish spirit that had shot my lord's buckle to flinders. But before I could play out my jest there came a roar and a clapping up aloft, and the reef-points played tattoo upon the shivering sails as the *Regina*, yawing into the wind, staggered on her course. Round spun Captain Scotton.

"Keep her full, you damned gutter-sweep, or you'll rip the sticks out of her. Call yourself a sailor? I'd carve a better out of six feet of rotten pump water! Don't you know larboard from starboard yet, you—"

I omit the rest. In a profession peculiarly rich in vituperation and anathema Captain Scotton's genius held a high place. His forceful expressive language abounded in figurative comparisons drawn from an imagination as riotous as it was lurid. It was his settled opinion that without such vigour of speech, driven home at times by a fist as hard as a wood-

block, no British sailor would respect authority or obey it promptly.

It was Father Macdonald who broke the force of the storm.

"At least we know our course for a day or two," he said, joining us. "Come, Mistress Joan, and make the acquaintance of your new home."

But when, leaving Captain Scotton's thunder still muttering, we followed him down one of the ladders which gave access to the main deck at either side of the poop, he led the way straight into the cuddy and closed the door behind us. Never had I known him so grave.

"Mistress Joan," he laid a hand on my arm as he spoke, "take care what you say on board the *Regina* and who hears you. Did you see the face of that wizened, brown-skinned fellow at the wheel just now? It was not bad seamanship that ran us head into the wind. I don't doubt he can steer a ship with the best of them, but he thought you were going to let out something he would give an eye to know and clean forgot where he was, forgot everything but to listen. Scotton was right the other day. There has been too much mystery. We shall have trouble before we see Whitcroft again."

"And I have dragged you into it," I began. But he cut me short.

"Not by one inch. Never think it. It is we who have thrust ourselves upon you. But now to make the best of it. We are not going back, and I doubt if we could if we would."

"Why not?" demanded my lord, who had not the smallest thought of such a thing.

"Wizen-face and his kind might have a word to say first."

"But they can know nothing for certain."

"That is why he listened so hard that he forgot himself." And they know enough. In Hull Scotton could name no port. Wizen-face and the rest thought, no doubt, it was privateering or filibustering, or perhaps downright buccaneering: but there would be pickings whichever it was and so they signed on, and a rough, hard-bitten crew they are, some of them. No one was let ashore at Whitcroft, but there would be scraps of talk with the lighterers. Then you called out for success for Mistress Sharland—I don't blame you, Dunquester, a man can't always carry a cool head when his heart is bubbling in him as yours was last night—but the hint was enough. This was no privateering venture, or there would not be a woman in it, and some, Plowden for instance, had heard of John Sharland. What then? You can see the answer for yourselves."

"Advise me," said I. "What must I do?"

"I'll fetch Catlett and we'll consider."

It was then, for the first time, I began to feel afraid. And yet I could not have told what my fear was, just that my heart had gone to water. If, knowing all I knew, I could have been back at The Scaur again, bringing this self-revelation with me, I would have been content to let go and say with Dave, We have each other and that is enough. All along Dave had been right, and now I feared to meet the reproach of too late! in his eyes. But when he returned with Father Macdonald, having left Hal climbing through the lubber's hole to the foretop with Ezra Plowden herding him, there was no reproach. Not in three months, I think, had I known him so cheerful. The milk was spilt and past crying over, nor was Dave ever one to nag a failure.

As if by common consent Father Macdonald took the lead. Though a younger man, he had lived in a

more spacious world than my lord, and whatever else, the failure in '15 had taught him a man cannot adventure his life for weeks at a stretch and not learn how to weigh his fellows.

"First, is it in anyone's mind to go back?"

Though he said "anyone" he looked at me and all waited for me to answer. But fresh as was my sorrow that I had ever left The Scaur I had had time to think. Now I put my thought in words.

"After last night how could we go back?"

At that even Dave nodded. And, indeed, if it is considered, how could we who had committed all Whitcroft to a breach of the law, and had sailed in glory to the accompaniment of prayers and cheers, sneak home and say we had come back for terror of the shadow of a fear? It was unthinkable! My lord, for one, could never more live in Dunquester. He would be laughed into exile.

"Then it's agreed that we go on and give no sign of doubt. Next, have you, Mistress Joan, any chart, any figures of direction, anything at all in writing?"

I shook my head. "Nothing, not one scrap. My father said memory was safest. What he told me was this, steer straight for—"

But Father Macdonald peremptorily silenced me. "No, no, no; tell us nothing," he cried, "not one word."

"But," objected Dave, "is it fair to leave all the risk of knowledge to Joan?"

"She risks nothing. Do you not see that knowledge is her safety? Not that we risk anything either," he added hastily, straining, I fear, his true belief that I might take comfort. "But wizen-face and the rest—it's not likely there are many of them—know Mistress Joan's value. Without her there

can be no pickings. She is Captain Joan, let all directions come from her, but until we are clear of the channel there's no need for her to speak out."

"And a King's ship may have a word or two to say before then," put in my lord. "We have no permit, remember."

Father Macdonald looked up with a start. "That's true. Word of our sailing must be well on the way south by this time. Hawke would have no option." He paused in thought. "There may be a road back to Whitcroft that way," he added significantly, his eyes on me.

But again I shook my head. Those in power had no love for my lord. Breaking the embargo might be magnified, might even be twisted into the beginning of that very disaffection he was leaving England to avoid, and was there not proof enough to satisfy an enmity willing to be convinced? Yes, triple proof—Father Macdonald's presence, the guns of the *Regina* and the absence of any known destination. In face of such evidence what would my unsupported story avail? Nothing at all.

"No King's ship with my goodwill," I said, and again Dave nodded agreement. His quickness of comprehension was a great comfort to me that trying day.

And that same afternoon I tested it yet more hardly.

I was seated at the table, busied with an unaccustomed needle, when Dave came into the cuddy. The loose-wristed sleeve had slipped to my elbow and Dave, stooping, kissed me midway on the arm, just a brush of the lips, no more, but it thrilled me to the heart as it had done every one of the score of times I had felt such a touch. Then I had said nothing, now I pulled down the sleeve hastily and spoke my mind.

"No, Dave, there must be none of that until all this is over. We must be good comrades and nothing more. Wizen-face, as Father Macdonald calls him, and his kind might not understand."

He stepped back, looking me in the eyes, not angry, but startled for the moment; then,

"But lovers all the while, Joan?"

"All the while, Dave dear. But—but—"

"That's enough for me. You are right as always. What matters a touch of the lip more or less? It's the heart that loves."

Yes, thank God, Dave understood.

CHAPTER XIII

FOG'S MY FRIEND

BECAUSE of that midnight flitting from Whitcroft the *Elizabeth Regina* was as shy of self advertisement as any modest-minded maiden of seventeen abroad in a world of strangers. But, as sometimes happens even to such maidens, the shrinking was of no avail. The winds had been light and baffling, and it was not until the morning of the fifth day that the Forelands were left behind. I had gone below to escape the thickening reek of a wet, grey air, but within an hour the rumble of excited voices to the accompaniment of scuffling feet overhead drew me on deck again. My lord, Father Macdonald and Captain Scotton were in a group near the starboard quarter, and I heard my lord say, "Crack on every rag, no matter what she says. You can't be expected to read her signals this weather."

"Who's reading their signals?" answered Scotton. "Not me! It's pirates they are, damned pirates. They rob a ship of her men and don't care a curse if she goes to hell in a gale short-handed. Crack on? Give me a wind and you may swear I'll crack on. Aye! there are signals right enough."

I suppose there were, though I could see none, to read them, that is. To leeward of us as we drifted, for there was little more than steering-way on us, was the loom of a ship, how distant I could not judge, so

baffling was the greyness of the air, now thicker, now thinner, as the fog settled or rose. But a tall ship she certainly was, bigger and taller by a great deal than the *Regina*. At times the hull was a blur, at times clear, but the fog was thickest overhead and from the foreyard up it took a sailor's eye to spell her out. There might have been a burst of flags but, as I say, none that I could see. Then there came a yellow flare and a roar, and on the instant Captain Scotton bellowed an order; out piped the whistle I had heard the night we left Whitcroft, and though I could not see what followed because of the thickness aloft even our slow drift ceased.

"Damned pirates, but they've got the best of us," I heard the Captain mutter. Then he swung round. "Will you take the risk, gentlemen?"

"What risk?" It was my lord who answered.

"That she'll hit us if she loads ball, as I expect she will."

"Why, man," said Father Macdonald, "she'd knock us to splinters in five minutes. That's a certainty, not a risk."

"The wind's freshening and driving down the smother." Scotton spoke tersely, as men do when time is short. "If it freshens and thickens we might slip away and chance a shot—it's for you to say."

"We'll chance it," said my lord as tersely.

A slow grin lightened Captain Scotton's hard face for a moment and I liked his looks better than I ever had yet.

"Then, gentlemen, you must play Captain between you and leave me on deck. It's odds that their budding Admiral—there's a boat on the way now d'you hear the chock-chock of the rollocks?—will be a new-breeched boy who just knows enough to know he knows nothing but that he's a King's Officer and

we're damned sweeps of common merchant folk. Bamboozle him down below as long as you can, then if you hear the whistle bundle him overboard. We don't want no King's Officer south of the line."

"What do you say, Macdonald?"

"That I don't want a King's Officer north of the line either! Down with you to the main deck, Dunquester; she's almost aboard of us. I'll go with you." It was then they saw me standing behind them, and almost in the same breath he went on. "Go to your sleeping-berth, Mistress Joan, we may need you."

"Truly need me?" I asked.

"Truly," he answered, and laughed, "it takes a woman at times to bamboozle a man. Come, Dunquester."

Now, I am gifted with as aching a curiosity as any woman, and would have given much to see what followed: who of my age would not, when there was so much that was new? But a hearty belief in Father Macdonald had grown up in me and I obeyed him now without a second question. The last I heard as I ran down the cuddy stairway was a hail from the steamy waters on the starboard side, and an answering "Aye, aye," from the waist of the ship.

But the same itch of curiosity in me left my door an inch or two ajar, and in the end I gained rather than lost by my obedience. For the crevice was hardly adjusted to my liking when the cuddy door was opened, and I heard my lord's voice, raised, as I thought, that I might hear.

"Yes, certainly, this is the *Elizabeth Regina*. And you have been searching for us all morning? I have heard of finding needles in a haystack, but to find one poor small ship in a channel fog is cleverer still. But you spoke of a permit, or something of

the sort, a moment since? Certainly, you shall have all the ship's papers. But first you will drink the King's health? What shall it be? We have French Burgundy, Spanish wine, Jamaica rum a dozen years in cask—"

"Have you the permit or not, that's the question?" By the touch of irritated insistence I understood that Captain Scotton's outburst of angry spleen had its justification.

"And do you, Sir, a King's Officer, refuse to drink His Majesty's health?"

"Drink with you? You forget yourself, my man. Show me your permit if you have it, and be smart."

Then Father Macdonald's voice broke in, very smooth and very suave, but also very ironical,

"With your permission, Mr. King's Officer, I have the honour to present to you my Lord Dunquester."

"And I," said my lord, no less smoothly, "have in turn the honour to present to you my friend, Mr. Angus Macdonald of Glen Monaar. Now, Sir, do you still refuse to drink the King's health?"

"God save the King!" answered the lad, "and that's health enough. You may be all you say, but the point is have you the permit or haven't you?"

He had answered well and as became his profession, and my lord pushed him no further.

"Permits, you understand, are matters for the excutive, not for simple passengers. We had better call the captain," said he, and hearing feet coming my way I pulled-to the door softly. I saw no reason why I should advertize my ache.

But at the first tap I opened it, keeping well within the berth. It was Father Macdonald.

"Here's a King's Officer, Captain. He will explain his business better than I can."

He turned back and without word said I followed

him. A tall, weedy lad was standing beside Lord Dunquester beyond the table in the mouth of the passage that led to the main deck. Whether he was sixteen and overgrown, or twenty and un-filled out, I could not guess, but his face went red as a beet when he saw me and he rapped out an oath. Instantly my lord turned on him.

"Cleanse your tongue, Sir. Have King's Officers ceased to be gentlemen that you curse in a lady's presence?"

Very wisely he returned no direct answer. "The permit, if you have one. I'll be fenced and fooled no longer."

"That is the captain's business. Captain Joan, have you a permit for doing what you have a lawful right to do?"

"A permit? said I, as if greatly astonished, "but for what purpose?"

"To leave port."

"But we have left port. Oh, Sir, because I am a woman and you a man is no reason why you should play on my ignorance. How can we need a permit to do what we have done?"

"Yes or no: have you the permit?"

"Oh, sir," I answered, half whimpering, "you frighten me when you grow so angry. If a permit is leave to leave port and we are at sea—"

"You have none, that's clear," he interrupted. "You can talk your sea-lawyery ashore."

But to my great relief the boom of a second gun cut him short in turn and slap through its rumble sounded Captain Scotton's whistle. The *Elizabeth Regina* heeled to the wind, shivered and staggered a moment, then heeled over again in livelier fashion.

"What's that?" he cried, clapping his hand to the pretence of a sword he carried.

"The recall," said my lord curtly. "Stir yourself, without a permit," and catching him under the arm he fairly bounced him through the door.

I had the end of the table to round and before I could follow he was scrambling over the bulwarks, a mere ghost in the thickness of the cold fog that was driving us down the channel six miles an hour.

The King's ship was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XIV

STRAWS IN THE WIND

SURELY it is the mercy of God that watches over sailor folk, and much need that it should, for at times they take but little care of themselves. For seven hours, though from the poop we could see neither stem nor truck except as a blur, we drove through the fog with every stitch of canvas drawing. Yet to give Captain Scotton his due there was no reckless carelessness. Through these seven hours, and until the fog thinned towards sunset, he stood by the binnacle except for a few minutes to snatch a meal, then Mr. Cuthbert took his place.

Two days later, and without further fright, we were in the jaws of the channel and the old question clamoured for an answer. But in these two days, following a hint from Father Macdonald, I had come to a decision and had my reply ready. We were standing near the wheel, almost where the question had been flung at me seven days before, but I made no attempt at secrecy.

"Head for where the thirtieth degree cuts the line."

For a moment, with eyes wrinkled almost out of sight, Captain Scotton stood and stared at me; then, without answer he went below, whether to lay off our course or verify a memory I could not guess. Nor does it matter which it was, but leaving his berth a

few minutes later his perplexity fell foul of Lord Dunquester, who was passing through the cuddy.

"My lord, I've had the course given me. You hired the ship, you pay my wages and know your own business I don't doubt. Nor do I ask what it is, though I have my own notions. But is it your wish that I should head for a hole in the water?"

"Father Macdonald and I," began my lord.

"Father Macdonald? Father Macdonald. What d'you mean by your Father Macdonald? The man's not a parson, is he?"

"A priest," corrected my lord.

"It's all one," he answered, with a fine but unintentional toleration. "A fool of a girl to lay the course and a priest aboard! A priest! And he's in it, too? Well, I'm—I'm—" But his customary eloquence failed him. "There'll be the devil to pay before all's over. And what am I to do? She has laid the course for just blank nothing; why, there's no land within miles and miles of the place."

"If I can trust Mistress Sharland, sir, surely you may? He spoke more stiffly than his wont, but Captain Scotton's growing familiarity vexed even his easy indulgence. But Scotton was in no way abashed at the implied rebuke.

"That's true enough. I, at least, have something in hand," and coming on deck he turned the *Regina's* head south-west and bade Ezra Plowden, who was at the wheel and had heard my answer, keep her so.

Plowden took his orders in silence, but two days later it was clear that Captain Scotton's chart was not the only one on board.

I think there must be some virtue in having sailor-blood in the veins. We were making little else than leeway in a south-east wind shifting to south, but I had soon got my feet under me and the reeling

stagger as the *Regina* bucketted close-hauled from roller to roller disturbed me not at all. Two yards away Ezra Plowden was again at the wheel, with no one nearer than the break of the poop. First he gave that hacking cough I had learned to know at Dunquester, then,

"Trust the old man," I heard him whisper, though I could see no movement of the lips. To speak at all when on duty at the wheel was an offence, to speak unspoken-to unpardonable. "Just put a name to the spot, Young Madam, an' I'll tell 'ee all about it." Pausing, he gave a hitch to his breeches, running his eyes aloft as if his one thought was to keep the sails full. "Not an inch south of the line the old man doesn't know. Better trust the old sailor."

Turning I faced astern. Father Macdonald's warning was in my mind, and I saw little of the jumble of broken waters that crossed our wake.

"Are they not all to be trusted?"

Again he rolled his eyes aloft, but before he could reply Captain Scotton roared out, "How was her head?"

"South-west, sir," he lied promptly, for he had eased her a point or two that he might talk the better.

"Then give her a point of southing."

"Aye, aye, sir," he answered, and brought her head closer to the wind, to let her fall off again the next moment with careful cunning. "Trust d'you say? Sartinly, sartinly, but there's none knows the coast like the old sailor."

"Is Michael Blair to be trusted?" I asked, and as I spoke the name, Plowden shot a glance at me for the first time. Michael Blair was Wizen-face. I thought his jaw fell a little, but he recovered himself

with his hacking cough, and bracing himself up to the wheel stared hard at the main top-sail.

"If you'd be so good as to ask me somethin' about the binnacle," he whispered. "Somethin' the old sailor can explain, d'you see."

I thought Captain Scotton must be coming aft, but when I turned we were still alone. Without understanding his meaning I took him at his word.

"What keeps the compass card balanced?" I asked, speaking out frankly and laying a hand on the brass as I questioned him.

"They do say," he whispered, pointing down with one hand while he clung to the kicking wheel with the other, "T'aint true, perhaps, but they do say Michael Blair sailed with Avery."

"Who is Avery?"

But he was already staring aloft, hanging on to the wheel as if his one thought was to hold his course with its extra point of southing to a hair-line.

"There's no better sailor aboard the *Regina* than Michael Blair; mind, I've said so," he said hoarsely. "As to him whose name was spoke just now, we'll say no more. The old man's trustin' y'e an' you'll trust the old man, won't ye, Young Madam? T'is ordained—"

"Then it will surely come to pass," I answered. "Of course I trust you. Listen, we are bound for where thirty cuts the line."

The glance he swept me was full of enquiry. Was I innocent, ignorant, playing with him, or only a fool? But I don't think he read a clear answer. What my father had bidden me keep back from Dave I was not going to tell Ezra Plowden. And yet it was quite true that I trusted him.

"Take care you don't miss port in the dark," he said, and with another hitch of the breeches he went

back to his study of the main topsail with no more apparent interest in Joan Sharland than if she had been the ship's cat.

Later in the day when, giving no reason for my question, I asked Father Macdonald who Avery might have been, he stared blankly at me.

"Avery?" he repeated. "Mistress Joan, who has put Avery into your head?" Then I told him what had passed. "Avery?" he repeated again, looking very thoughtful. "How old would you take Michael Blair to be?"

"Forty, perhaps forty-five."

"And sailors—his type—commonly look older than they are. The leather-like wizening of his face is wind and weather, not age. No, I don't think Blair can have sailed with Avery."

"But who was this Avery?" I persisted.

He hesitated a moment before answering; then, "A sea-dog with loose views on the rights of property."

"A pirate, in plain words?"

"Mistress Joan," he said earnestly, "Blair never sailed with Avery, his age is against it. It is nearly thirty years since Avery seized the *Charles II.* and went pirating in the Red Sea. Put the charge out of your head as untrue. The point for us is that Plowden, for some reason of his own, would have us believe that Blair was one of his scoundrels."

"But I have confidence in Plowden."

"So have I," he agreed, then added drily, "until his interest lies the other way! Don't be anxious, Mistress Joan. Whatever was Plowden's reason—and perhaps he wants to curry favour—there are honest men on board, plenty of them, of that I have no doubt at all. But we must keep counsel and watch what straws blow in the wind."

And such a straw—so to call it—there blew ten days later.

To record our daily life is none of my purpose any more than to detail the changing moods of the sea. Each of our company passed the hours as his bent and opportunities led him—my lord with much writing in the cuddy, Father Macdonald over certain inseparable books, Dave keeping Hal up to his schooling to the boy's great chagrin. He had pictured an endless holiday, and lo! the dominie was always at his elbow! As compensation he was allowed the freedom of the ship, the men's quarters alone being forbidden, and many a game he and Will Crisp, the cabin boy, played aloft. At first Captain Scotton had grumbled, but now, so long as the work was done the lads were allowed their freedom, Captain Scotton concerning himself solely with the sailing of the ship, and, as it seemed to me at times, not very greatly with that.

For myself, I had Dave as I had never had him to myself before, and when he was busied with Hal these same moods of the sea were interest enough. Truly the sea is another Cleopatra: it subdues the hearts of all who look upon its face with understanding, nor can custom stale its infinite variety.

Father Macdonald's choice of books was significant. He usually had three with him as he lay full length upon the poop, propped against the windward bulwark—Saint Thomas à Kempis, a treatise on Marlborough's Tactics and another on Navigation. These he appeared to read indiscriminately, but having read for an allotted time it was his custom to descend to the main deck and walk its length back and forth, sentry fashion, his hands behind his back, his chin on his breast. Many a time I wondered whether Peace or War, the Imitation of Christ, or the battle of Blenheim was chief in his thoughts!

His custom was well known, and this day he followed it as usual. I was below and did not see what happened, but as he walked, and in the one instant there came a shout from aloft and a crash behind, if anything the latter first. Looking back he saw a sailor he had just passed crumpling up on a coil of ropes and a huge loose block skidding forward along the deck. Involuntarily he glanced up, and as he stooped over the fallen man he carried with him a recollection of fore-shortened bodies, and faces that stared down on him from the topsail yard. But the cry and crash had been heard. From all directions help came, but those aloft were smartest and he was still trying to lift the fallen man's head to his knee when Michael Blair edged him aside.

"We'll see to him, sir. A block must have slipped. Fetch the surgeon some of you chaps, while we take him forrad."

By that time Mr. Stenson, who was on duty, was down from poop and Father Macdonald drew away to give place to authority.

"An accident," he said, as we crowded round him asking questions. "They are always possible aboard ship and I'm afraid the poor fellow's hard hit." And there we stood, speculating and commenting as those who know nothing of the truth of it will do at such times, until Mr. Stenson returned.

"Eliot is with him," he began, "I'm afraid—" then his eye lit on me, and he went red as he commonly did whenever I spoke to him, and broke off, glancing aloft. "Where were you when it fell, sir? There? H'm. D'you see that rope. If it hadn't turned the block aside you'd be in your berth with a stove skull, damned clumsy brutes that they are."

"Who let it fall?" asked my lord.

"Blair, and he'll know it when the skipper talks

to him. There are no sailors, nowadays," said the boy, hardly yet in his twenties, "nothing but sloppy-fingered longshoremen."

"And where is Captain Scotton?"

Again he went red. "Eh? Oh! it's his watch below," he answered. "I must get back to the poop."

"Captain Scotton sleeps soundly," was my lord's sole comment given with significance. Then he went back to his writing.

In this hotch-potch of the happenings since leaving Whitcroft I have hardly made mention at all of Mr. Eliot. He was from Aberdeen, as he told us thrice daily, and in times of excitement spoke a language so hard to be understood that I do not propose to set it down here, nor indeed does he truly touch my story at all vitally. For the rest, except when he grew controversial, denouncing the Scarlet Woman—which he did with great vehemence so soon as he knew Father Macdonald's profession—he was as innocent of harm as most of his own physic. That afternoon he came to me.

"There's few things weemen can do better nor men, Mistress Sharland, but carin' for sick fowk's one o' them," said he. "Would you be feared to sit a wee while wi' yon poor deein' chap?"

"Dying?" I repeated, distressed and horrified, for no particulars of the accident had leaked aft.

"Ou aye: an' if you had sic a clout on the occiput ye'd be deein' tae. Y're sure y're no feared?"

"Why should I be afraid?" I demanded.

"Oh, nae reason ava but whimsies, though I've known that serve as a reason many a time," he answered. "Will it please y'e to come the now?"

It was the first time I had ever set foot in a forecastle and the gloom of the windowless cavern of a

place stayed me at the very entrance with a gust of repugnance. The scuttle was closed, so that the only light came by the door which we partly blocked: but Mr. Eliot went briskly on and I followed, ashamed of the moment's hesitation. Certainly nothing short of the eyes of a cat could have known what lay ahead.

And what I saw—the tiers of bunks sloping backwards and upwards as the *Regina* widened, the sea-chests stowed below, the dirty slush lamp swinging in the middle, the scatteration of loose garments flung anywhere out of hand, even the sailors flitting here and there like shadows in their barefooted noiselessness, only grew upon me by slow degrees.

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN SCOTTON SPEAKS HIS MIND

At the left, far in, Mr. Eliot turned.

"This is him," he said, taking no care to lower his voice.

Then he stooped, speaking sharply, "Hey! Can ye hear me, my man? No! I thocht he wouldna. He'll gang off as he is, and maybe it's just as weel. I'm thinkin' it wouldna' be a varra eedifyin' death-bed. If yon black popissher had him it would be pull de'il, pull priest, an' it's easy kennin' which would win."

His callous hardness—or so it seemed—grated on me as vexingly as his injustice to Father Macdonald, and I broke in to ask how I could help.

"It's little ye can do for him, Mistress Sharland. Here's broth, gie him a sup wi' the spoon when y'e can, an' maybe these other godless carles will hae the grace to keep quiet seeing you here. They're rough tykes, but y'e needna be feared. I'll crack the skull o' the first that's no ceevil, an' I'll be in from time to time."

With that he left me. He was right, there was little I could do, nothing almost, and it is my belief that the sole reason why he brought me at all was to give the dying man a chance of quietness. In his way he was as rough as the forecastle tykes themselves, but under the coarse shell there was a sound kernel.

As I grew accustomed to the gloom I saw that several of the berths were occupied—the watch below, I suppose. Some were asleep, some lying smoking, but though they called one to another now and then there was nothing offensive, and mostly the only sounds were the moans of my patient and the gentle, rhythmic sigh of the sea, like the deep breathing of some mighty animal, as the *Regina* pushed her way very slowly southward. But the traffic in and out was frequent and to have a heedless jest cried was common, though the jester mostly quavered into silence when he saw me sitting by the bunk.

And, just as it is none of my purpose to detail our daily life or the moods of the sea, so I would have left Mr. Eliot's summons to the dying man's bunk-side untold but for one of these jests.

For more than an hour I had been spoon-feeding a mouth that swallowed unconsciously. The change of watch was drawing near and a sailor, featureless against the brightness of the daylight, called from the door.

"Watch ahoy! Wake up, bullies!" he roared. "Are you there, Blair? Aft with you, my son. Old Scooter wants to know how it was you missed your shot. Sharp now, he's in the devil of a bat," and in the stir that followed I saw Wizen-face climb out of an opposite bunk. He stood looking about him a moment uncertainly then crossed to where I sat.

"You heard him, Miss? That was his stupid joke. They allays guy a chap who's made a clumsy fool of himself. Don't you think no more of it. Poor old Barker, how's he doin', Miss? He'll come all right, never fear. A fool's joke, that's what it was. I'd give all my pay, aye, an' more, if that block hadn't slipped."

Then upon impulse I did a foolish thing.

"Put your hand on his head and say you didn't mean to drop it," I said. "We'll see if the blood flows."

"Mean it?" he echoed indignantly, "How can you say such a thing, miss? O' course I didn't mean it, but I might hurt poor old Barker if I touched him."

"Just so," I answered. "The captain wants you; I think."

For a moment he stood looking down on me, but his back was to the light and I saw little of his face; when he spoke his voice was full of aggrieved complaint,

"An' a fine dressin' down he'll give me! But there's none sorrier than I am, an' Barker'd be first to say so if he could speak. Don't you fret, miss, he'll be all right, you take my word for it," and he followed the rest on deck.

Why I was foolish in challenging Blair was this—if the man was honest I set him against me, if he was of Avery's type, even though he might never have sailed with Avery, I warned him, and if he was in the swithers between the two, as well might be the truth with some honest men and some rogues on board, I might turn the balance the wrong way; in no case could the challenge have done any good. I saw that for myself as I sat thinking in the quiet of the fo'cksle while all hands were aft to hear Captain Scotton tell Blair his opinion of him.

But if mischief was done repentance would not cure it, and the best that remained was to let Father Macdonald know all that had passed. This I did so soon as released by Mr. Eliot. He listened in silence as I urged him to caution and then spoke the regret that was never far from my mind, that I had brought my lord and him into such an adventure.

"'Twas ordained, as Plowden says," he answered, and laughed, but instantly grew grave again. "As to Blair, we'll accept his protest and let it pass as accident. I think, perhaps, it was the priest his superstition aimed at, not the man. It's not my custom to be frightened by blackguards, but to please you, Mistress Joan, I'll keep an eye in the top of my head in future."

Barker, poor shadow across our path of life, justified Mr. Eliot's Aberdonian training. He died that night, found a sailor's burial in the early dawn, and was forgotten in a week.

And so, in peacefulness July crept into August, August to the verge of September, and through the increasing heat the *Elizabeth Regina* worked south and west, now baffled by light airs, flat calms and contrary breezes, now carrying on nine miles an hour before a full-hearted wind, till, having reached what Captain Scotton called the hole in the water, I laid the course for Cape Delle Los Reyos. This time I was careful that no one but Captain Scotton should hear me, and he, on his part, kept counsel, simply shifting the ship's head a point or two to the west.

Thereafter, for three days, he was little seen on deck, and each time in a worse temper. Then on the evening of the third day he sent Crisp to my lord with a request that he would join him in his private berth.

What followed I only know from hearsay, and set it down as tersely as I can.

He greeted my lord with his old ducking bow, but more, as it seemed, by custom than in respect. The berth opened off the passage from the cuddy to the main deck. It was very barely furnished, the bunk lay along the inner partition, facing it a window looked out forward, and under it was a table with a

couple of low seats drawn up one at either side. On the table stood a bottle of rum, another of French brandy, a pitcher of water and two glasses. With a second duck of the head he begged my lord to be seated, stretched out his hand as if by instinct to the rum bottle, then drew it back with a grunt.

"What's your drink?" he asked, brusquely.

"Neither," answered my lord. "And I tell you flatly, Scotton, you have drunk not alone enough, but too much already, and not for the first time either."

For a moment Scotton stared at him, his little eyes hard and challenging: then, "Aye," he said, "that's truth and wisdom, though the devil preaches." Taking each bottle in turn he drove home its cork with a blow of his hairy fist and pitched one to the head and the other to the foot of the bunk. Then pushing himself on his legs he drew up the lattice shutter of the window, muttering, "There's no need these swabs should spy on us," and sat down heavily again. "We must have a talk we two."

"I am at your service," said my lord civilly, though Scotton's manner ruffled him, as it had often done of late.

"Aye, a talk. I'm a plain man, my lord: maybe you don't know that I worked aft by way of the fore scuttle? Well, I did, and I'm not ashamed to own it."

"'Tis to your credit," said my lord. "I left the choice of captain to Barr and Jarvis, the agents to the owner, and they sent me you as a fine seaman and an honest man."

"And I've brought the hooker here all right, haven't I? As to honesty, I don't think it'll lie in your mouth to miscall me, my lord though you are. But I'll come to the point. What's my share to be? That's what I want to know before we raise land."

"Your share? I don't understand you."

"Huh!" Captain Scotten snorted, looked round at the rum bottle as if regretfully, then reaching for the pitcher filled himself a glass of water which he drank at a gulp. "Don't understand me, don't you? Then I'll make it clear; here it is in a word. For all the girl's mystery there's not a man on the ship but knows we're treasure hunting. We'll rise Los Reyos in two days; the end's not far off, what's my share? Is that clear?"

"You have your wages," answered my lord sharply, "your own price named by yourself, and as an honest man—"

"Aye, as honest as others I tell ye. Wages? Who's denyin' it? An' wages were all I looked for until I saw you an' that priest man bring young madam aboard at Whitcroft. Then I smelt mischief. Money makes rogues of all. Here's how I ciphered it out—'Twas a treasure hunt; you charted the ship to take your whack out of the girl's weakness an' the man who calls himself priest was in it too. Oh, aye! gentlemen both! Honest? aye, an' after fifty years of honesty it comes hard on a man to be a rogue. It took a deal of drink to drive me to it, but why should Tom Scotton be honester than a peer of the kingdom? It's little honesty earns by the sea, I'm growin' old an' there's others to feed; so now, my lord, what's my share?"

Through his harangue, jerkily delivered and with many pauses for the groping after words to fit his meaning, Scotton sat bolt upright, the same hard challenge in his eyes. That he was, as it were, running himself along unwillingly by the scuff of the neck was evident, and Dunquester, recognizing the tension of the man's mood, curbed his sense of offence.

"A fine seaman and an honest man," he repeated, meeting the challenge frankly. "And both still, in

spite of the drink, I don't blame your suspicion, Captain Scotton. As to your share, your share's mine—to do a good turn to a girl with no friend of her blood in all the world, and keep the hands clean before God. That there's a treasure is true enough: but it is Mistress Sharland's, and neither Macdonald nor I make, claim, or accept one stiver of it."

"You mean that, my lord?"

"As God lives, Captain Scotton."

"Then all this is just to stand by young Madam Sharland?"

"Just that. Her father was my friend."

"A farmer-man, I'm told?"

"But none the less my friend"

"Just to stand by young madam?" He paused, rubbing his chin, then, after a moment's silence, burst out, "I'm damned if I won't stand by her, too. My lord, will ye give me the honour of a hand-shake; and not hold it against me that I thought you no better than I was ready to be myself?"

"A fine seaman, and an honest man," said Dunquester for the third time, holding out his hand to be crushed in a horny grip as he spoke. "Captain Scotton, I think better of the man who stumbles but clears his feet again than I do of him who never trips just because the path is smooth and there's no temptation to fall. And Mistress Sharland will have need that we stand by her. We are here for plain talk and I'll talk plainly. Barker was murdered. An accident? Yes, for it was meant for Father Macdonald, but murder none the less."

Scotton nodded. "I smelt that, too," he said. "Blair's too smart a sailor to let blocks slip. But I'll tell ye the plain truth, my lord. I was drunk that day, drunk killing the common honesty in me, and though I trounced him for a lubber before the

whole ship's company it was only with half a heart, for I'd a right to be trounced myself. But that's a bygone; we can't go back on it now."

"Nor do I wish to. My meaning is this—there are more than Mistress Sharland in danger. The man who could drop a block to kill in cold blood would murder us in our sleep."

"If we had young madam's treasure aboard, yes; but not till then lest she should take fright and turn back." The hard eyes grew truculent and the red face flamed yet redder. "Don't fret, my lord, don't fret none of you. I know my beauties, and if once we have young madam's treasure aboard, Master Blair may learn that Old Scooter learned a trick or two as he worked aft through the fo'cksle scuttle. But the first thing is—do you trust me, my lord?"

"I'll shake hands on it again, if you like," answered Dunquester.

"Thankee, my lord; then young madam must trust me too, or we'll lose ourselves groping in the dark."

"Don't doubt it," said my lord, rising as he spoke. "She will trust you as I do, and that's to the hilt."

CHAPTER XVI

A PROP BREAKS UNDER US

THAT is the reason why we were all gathered in the cuddy the next night, Hal, who shared Dave's cabin, having been sent unwillingly to bed. He was all on fire with a boy's excited imagination of the wonderful new land the morning was to bring us, and would have spent the night on the fore truck had we let him. Mr. Cuthbert made one round the cuddy table, the lamps were lit, and stifling hot though it was, a tarpaulin had been flung over the closed skylight. Outside were the lightest of light airs; the *Regina* had barely steering way on her and the slap of the canvas against the ropes, as she rocked to the lift of the oily swell, sounded like musket shots, so still was the night.

Captain Scotton, who had fixed the hour, went straight to his point.

"If there's any stir of wind through the night we should raise Cape Delle Los Reyos with sun-up. It's for you, Mistress Sharland, to say if you can work closer than that." But though he spoke at me his eyes were on my lord; and it was my lord who replied, answering the personal appeal that underlay the question.

"Mistress Sharland trusts all here as I do," said he. "Now, Joan, lass."

But to speak was not so simple. They were staring

at me, all five of them, Captain Scotton hardest of all, and it came home to me that I was, as it were, on trial. On my bare word thousands of money had been spent, thousands of miles travelled, and how near we had drawn to the central fires of evil, Barker's death in part told me. What if I was wrong after all? The thought daunted me to dumbness.

Two at least understood and tried to help, each in his own way.

"Take your time, Joan," said Dave. "It'll all come right."

Said my lord, speaking in his grandest manner to the world at large, "It comes from my dear friend, John Sharland. No man who knew John Sharland failed to trust him."

Somehow, the understanding heartened me, though perhaps it may be that confidence comes of being understood. I turned to Captain Scotton.

"Do you know the coast, sir?"

"No," he answered, "but there's one aboard does—that fellow Plowden you shipped at Whitcroft. I've sounded them all in turn, and from what he says he's the most likely. Well, young mistress?"

"Here is what my father told me the night he died:—'Sail for Los Reyos; beyond are three points showing at high water, the middle humped like a camel: beyond the three points is a strand with a great cotton-wood back from the centre and a stream to the south: a mile beyond and there's a rocky creek with a ship's stern jammed hard and fast. It's still aboard—ingots of gold, ingots of silver; cups, platters, dishes, some gold, some silver—mostly silver; gems cut and uncut, diamonds, rubies—a great treasure, a very great treasure.'" I paused to draw a deep breath and it seemed to me that a sound like the sigh of the wind filled the cabin; perhaps it

was only my own breath hollow in my ears. "That's all I know," I ended, "is it enough?"

Captain Scotton had never taken his eyes off me. "How far beyond Los Reyos?"

"My father did not say."

"Not far; that I think is evident," said Father Macdonald. "Mr. Sharland was too precise about the rest. Is it enough, Captain Scotton, and what do you make of it?"

"We'll have to fumble our way down the coast by daylight, an' maybe have to wait for the tides, but it's clear enough. As to what I make of it, I make this—we have gales up north, but none to match those hereabouts an' that minds me, this is about the season for them. Young madam's father, I take it, was caught in one of the worst, laid helpless and driven ashore stern foremost with all his treasure in the lazereet, as it might be beyond the mast there. As she struck so she held, but broke in two an' went to pieces forrad. For why? It's the ship's stern, he says, that's hard and fast, not the ship herself. What followed then, God knows. That's how I read it." He turned his hard eyes on me. "Ingots an' diamonds! You take your luck very quiet, young mistress."

"I would give it all to be home in peace," I answered. "I know I forced the coming against other's wisdom, but it was never the treasure that drew me—you believe that, Dave, don't you? It was my word to my father as he lay dying."

"Aye, aye," said Scotton, "that's the way of it. Some'll damn their souls an' get nothin', while others who want nothin'—"

But his moralities were cut short. With a scrambling leap Dave, who faced forward, cleared both table and bench-back beyond it, made a bolt for

the cuddy door, tore it open and disappeared into the darkness. It all passed in three seconds and in ten more he was back, panting.

"There was someone listening, I saw the door move; but he got clear away."

"Couldn't be," declared Scotton. "Why, the whole watch on the deck would see him. Your mind's playin' y'e tricks, Mr. Catlett."

"Maybe," answered Dave. "It would be nothing wonderful. I know I'll be thankful when all this is over and we home again in peace, as Joan says."

"Now that you know all that can be told what do you propose to do?" It was Father Macdonald who brought us back to the main purpose of our council.

"Have Plowden down. He's at the wheel an' Stenson can relieve him with not a soul the wiser. I fixed it so on purpose. Mr. Cuthbert, will you—"

But my lord interposed. "I brought this man Plowden on board, but I know nothing of him. Are you going to trust him with what Mistress Sharland has told us?"

"Trust him? Not likely! Pick his brains, if he has any, that's all. Up with you, Cuthbert."

It is my belief that both Mr. Cuthbert and Mr. Stenson had been warned, for in no more time than it took to run up the companion-way to the poop and come back again, Mr. Cuthbert returned with Ezra Plowden at his heels. Never had I seen a man look so frightened; his healthy bronze was lost in a dirty grey; he slouched as if suddenly he had grown very old, and the duck of his head, as he halted with his back against the mast, was jointed to a sneaking glance that swept us all with its scared enquiry.

"D'you know the coast hereabouts, my man?"

At the question, barked out rather than spoken as christian to christian, which was Scotton's way all

over, he straightened himself and a glint rose in his eyes. Nothing could have been brisker than his answer,

"Aye, aye, sir. If young madam will only say—"

"I'll do the sayin'," broke in Captain Scotton brusquely. "South of Cape Los Reyos is it sand or rocks?"

It was Dunquester over again. First into one pocket a hand dived, then into another, until at length a wisp that looked the same identical rag was lugged out, spat into noisily, folded up and thrust back where it belonged, while all the time the gaze roamed about above our heads.

"South of Los Reyos? Aye, aye; rock or sand d'you say? Aye, aye, to be sure, why, sometimes one and sometimes t'other."

Being a woman I must needs have my say. "You told me you knew every inch of the coast?"

"None better," he answered. "Just say where—"

"You'll leave it to me, if you please, Mistress Sharland." Captain Scotton's voice rasped with resentment, "South of Los Reyes, now, which is it?"

"South of Los Reyos? Aye, aye." He paused, fumbling afresh at his pockets, his vigilant eyes fixed this time upon me. "South of Los Reyos, d'you say? Why, rock, rock, an' then sand, what y'e might call sand."

"How do you come to know the coast so well?"

This time there was no pause. He shifted easily on his feet, complacency broad on his face.

"T'was this way, gentlemen all, an' Young Madam. When I sailed with Captain Cook in '83—from Virginia we sailed, and that's a paradise for sure—we traded south, five years it was, maybe six. I was

young an' a beggar to notice, an' there was nothin' I didn't see, an' nothin' I don't remember. 'Twas that way."

It was then that Dave surprised me even more than when he had scrambled across the table after nothing. It is to be borne in mind that though some of us had heard this much of Plowden's story before, it was new to Dave. He had been at Three Oaks the night it was told.

"Traded South?" said he, "To Recife, I suppose, and Mercadello and Santa Carlos and such like places?"

"The very ports, your worship's honour," said Plowden. "I know them well."

"And is the big bluff north or south of Santa Carlos?"

Back he went to his old tactics, one hand to one pocket, the other to another, his eyes fixed all the while in vacancy over our heads; then with a hitch of his breeches he hackked his throat loudly.

"North or south, d'you say? Well, not to tell a lie I don't rightly remember."

"That's reasonable," said Dave and I, who knew him so well, caught the passion in his voice, and wondered what was coming next. "Then I suppose when Captain Cook died off Cape Blanco the year after sailing from Virginia you stuck to Davis?"

The change that swept over Plowden's face was terrible to see—terrible and pitiable. It's gay complacency was wiped from it as one wipes breath from glass; again the shadow of age descended, deeper, greyer, more potent and more patent than before: his jaw dropped slackly, his eyes grew very weary, innumerable unsuspected wrinkles sprang into being, he groped backward for the mast with one hand to steady himself.

"You--you weren't there," he stammered. "You weren't born."

"No," said Dave, "but William Dampier was there and told the story in a book I have at Three Oaks. You are a liar, and a stupid one. Here's the truth. There is no such place as Santa Carlos or Mercadello: you never sailed down this coast at all, nor came within a thousand miles of it, at least not then. From Virginia you sailed direct to Sierra Leone."

The sweat was heavy on Plowden's forehead by this time, his face livid, his knees trembling. "Gentlemen all," he burst out, "Your worships—Young Madam, t'was no fault of mine. How could I stand agen them—but I did." He caught eagerly at a suggestion in his mind, "Twice over, aye, three times, at my life's risk."

"You damned swab!" roared Scotton, flourishing his clenched fists, "lied to me, have y'e? tricked and fooled me, have y'e? By God, I'll learn y'e."

But my lord and Dave both had him by the shoulders, forcing him back, nor, strong men though they were, was it easy to hold him, so violent was his rage. But for their restraint I think he would have killed Plowden, certainly he would have taken no heed where or how hard he struck. Nor did Plowden seem afraid of him: he was already so possessed with fear that terror could go no further.

"None of that, Scotton," said my lord, authoritatively, "if he has lied he lied for bread; there's been worse than that on board the *Regina*."

For a moment Scotton swayed, wrestling to free himself and frothing at the mouth with anger. But the grip was too strong for him. Also my lord's plea quieted him: he thought their last night's scene

was aimed at, whereas my lord had Barker's death in his mind.

"Aye," he said with a panting groan, "that's true. Get back to the wheel, my man. You may thank God these gentlemen kept my hands off y'e, for as sure as you're a living liar I'd have cracked your skull as y'e deserve. Be off now."

But Plowden only stood staring, mouthing his lips to moisten them, nor did he move until I said he had better go, and we would try to forget all that had happened. Then he drew himself back against the mast, started cringing in abject fright as he felt its touch, and looked us all over as if he did not understand.

"Mistress Sharland is right," said my lord sharply. "Get back to your duty, my man. We'll not hold this against you."

At that he straightened himself, fetching his breath in a long sigh. "'Twas ordained," he muttered, but speaking his thoughts to himself rather than to us, "t'was ordained for sure," and with a queer twisted grin on his mouth he gave a cramped duck of the head and slunk between the mast and the cabin partition. A moment later we heard him climbing the stairs slowly as if his legs failed.

"Poor devil," said my lord. "He's old. There's nothing more pitiful than age that has worked all its life and must starve at the end for want of work that's denied it because of age. Small wonder he lied. Who wouldn't, in his place? He told us the same story at Dunquester; you remember, Macdonald?"

Father Macdonald nodded. "I don't think he is the only liar. Or, rather, I think Master William Dampier did not tell the whole truth in the book that's at Three Oaks. There is something left out. What happened, I wonder, at Sierra Leone that

Plowden thought Catlett had unearthed? Enough to hang him, to judge by his fright. But that's between him and the law; we are warned. Now that Plowden has failed, what do you propose to do, Captain Scotton?"

"Do? Do as we would always have done—fumble our way down the coast by daylight till we find the three points, the strand and the big cotton-wood; then—"

"Yes," said Father Macdonald, as Captain Scotton broke off, "What then? That's the kernel of it all."

"Aye," answered Scotton shortly, "but it's not sailorin'."

"No, but we look to you to advise us."

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then shifted the burden with a question.

"What do you say, Cuthbert?"

"Do we know how many rogues there are aboard, sir?"

"No" but more than we want, and to-night adds one to them."

"Then does a day more or less make a difference?"

"No," said my lord, answering for us all, and, after all these weeks what did another day matter?

"Then why not give them a run ashore, every man-jack of them the ship can spare? If you want an excuse let them fill the empty water-casks, though there's no shortage, or just let them play themselves. Perhaps they'll show their hand, perhaps not. We'll keep on board the men we can trust and see what happens. Next day—well, sir, I would leave next day alone for the present."

"It's for Mistress Sharland to say," said Scotton.

And I, what could I do but agree? Every day, nay every hour, distaste was growing within me. Dearly as I had loved my father, deeply though I

reverenced his memory, the question was never put out of my mind—How could he, who knew there was no law south of the line, willingly have tangled me in such a coil? Not that I had met with incivility from any man or caught as much as an ugly look, but every day brought its proof that south of the line was no place for a woman. And the only answer I found to the question was that the five-and-twenty years and more had dulled the edge of memory. There was this, too—that which a man can do himself he always thinks not difficult for another. But, as I say, I went in daily growing distaste, though without any great cause for fear I could have named.

And that night distaste grew yet deeper for two new reasons. On deck, as we took the air for an hour after the stifling heat of the cuddy, Dave told us he had made no mistake—there had been a listener at the door, though not, he thought, for long. He had entered last, left the door tight shut and found it open. Who had opened it? Blair? Perhaps so, though we found him at the wheel when we came on deck. Then, when at last I went below leaving Blair still at the wheel, it was to find that my berth had been ransacked where ever a scrap of paper might lie hidden, though no lock was forced.

CHAPTER XVII

WE ARRIVE

It was long before I slept, and then so heavily that neither the cry of Land ho! nor the confusion which followed disturbed me. In the end the rousing was Hal's work. To him there had never been such an event in the world's history, and it was intolerable that I should bear no part. Robbing himself of thirty delicious seconds he rushed down to hammer at my door and cry, "Joan! Joan! Joan!" until I answered.

"Land, Joan, land: do make haste," and with a last imperative rattle of the handle he raced up the stairway.

Now, just as I omit the moods of the sea and the important nothings which make up shipboard life from day to day, as having no direct bearing on our venture, so I leave apart this story of our approach to a new world as little by little the dead, grey cloud upon the horizon took form, colour and life. Whoso has the gift of imagination and a soul to understand needs no help from me, his heart will thrill, his veins run fire without my aid; whose has not would see no more than my eyes showed me—a dense growth that fought the tides stubbornly, a shallow headland sloping slowly from the sea, a range of arid hills blue in the greater distance, a line of coast that ran west into nothing and another that drew south to a dim cape distant I could not guess how far.

There were few greetings that morning. But as I approached the break of the poop where Dave and our friends stood together, talking eagerly, Captain Scotton turned.

"Los Reyos," he said curtly, pointing to the nearer headland.

"And the three points?" I made certain we could not be overheard before I put the question.

"It's too soon for that." Then he shook his head discontentedly. "And how can I tell how near it's safe to stand in to look for them?"

"Can you guess at the tide?" I asked.

"Near high water. It's a stony beach an' the run o' the surf's not far short of the jungle."

"Then there should be plenty of water."

"How do you know that?" he demanded, bristling. "How do you know it's not a flat bottom an' no more than ten feet between high and low water?"

"You said last night that my father drove ashore stern foremost, therefore he drove ashore floating. Where there was water to float him in the hollows of the waves there is water to float us in a calm sea."

"Bravo! Captain Joan," cried my lord, clapping his hands softly. But Captain Scotton took no offence, which he might readily have done.

"That was three, or five—perhaps ten miles below there. When you know anything of the sea, Young Mistress, you'll not need to be told the difference that may make. As it is I have half a mind to put the helm down at once: it might save a day. If we miss our bearings this tide we must wait till to-morrow."

He looked at me as if for approval and promptly I assented, more to show my confidence in his judgment than from any knowledge of my own. Next minute we swung round and with the yards almost squared drifted south, but before the ropes were coiled down

after the shift of sail Captain Scotton had ordered the bo'sun to pipe all hands aft.

Through these weeks, though I had come to know most of the men by sight, and there were few whom I had not spoken to, this was the first time I had seen the ship's company gathered together. My heart sank as I scanned them over, and back to my mind, all unbidden, came my first impression the day we had boarded the *Regina* in Whitcroft roads—an ill-conditioned, hard-bitten crew. And they looked it as they stood bareheaded on the lower deck staring up hard at us.

Some I could name: there was Bemrose, the carpenter; Hoggett, a Whitcroft man; wizen-faced Blair; Carleton, misshappen, but as active a man and as good a sailor as any on board; Ezra Plowden, hanging back as far out of sight as might be, yet plainly eager to lose nothing that might be said. These I knew and others.

A careless and a callous nursing mother the sea had been to most of them. It had not struck me before, but there was scarcely one of them who was not scarred—a blinded eye, a maimed hand, jointless or even fingerless, a slash across cheek or forehead. Yes, a hard-bitten, ill-favoured, ill-conditioned lot: if they were the true Heart of Oak there were surely tough knots and an ugly cross-grain somewhere in the timber. That they were every one agog with curiosity was plain, not alone from the intent expectation of the staring eyes, but also from the utter stillness: not so much as a foot shuffled as they swayed to the slow pitch of the deck.

"My lads," said Scotton in quite a hearty way for him, "here's land as y'e see, an' the first part o' the voyage is over. There's no denyin' you've done well an' a run ashore's your due. By the chart there

should be a river hereabouts a trifle to the south. If there's good holding-ground we'll anchor an' fill a water cask or two an' take a spell off. Get the boats ready to lower away as soon as the anchor's fast. Mr. Cuthbert will go in charge. Half a dozen of you'll have to stay aboard, but they'll get their turn later. Take your prog with you an' cook it your own way. It'll be your day to do as you like with. Now then, stir yourselves an' lose no time."

For a moment, to use a sea phrase, they hung in the wind, then Blair flourished his hat over his head with the greatest of good will.

"Hooray!" he shouted, "three cheers for Captain Scotton; with a will, my lads, Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

"Aye," said Scotton in his beard, "cheer away! old Scooter has your measure, you damned scoundrel!" Then, laughing, shouting, frolicking, as if the strain of some tension had been removed, as the group below broke up he waved his hand in acknowledgment and turned to Mr. Cuthbert.

"Take three boats: that leaves the dinghy for us if we need it. Sling a cask into each boat but except to fill the casks let 'em do as they please. Just warn them not to wander too far, and the rabinet," he nodded as he spoke at a small brass piece clamped to the deck," will be the recall. Say little, Cuthbert, give them a free hand, an' keep your eyes open."

"And if they want to spread about, sir?"

"Let 'em spread! Only, tell them not to follow the stream."

"But by the coast they may find—"

Captain Scotton snorted, "Don't you know sailormen better nor that? What they've leave to do's not worth the doing—what's forbidden's the thing. And who's to find? Blair and his sort? If Blair thinks

at all it's odds he'll think you're trying to keep him from searchin' up stream an' so he'll search up stream. Off with you, Cuthbert: keep them movin' for the next half hour and don't give them time to palaver. We'll have the cloths off her at once and creep in under the foresail on chance."

Thenceforward all was bustle. What all the ordered turmoil meant I did not know, but if ever a crew worked cheerily it was the crew of the *Regina*. They whistled, they sang, they chattered, they jested, they laughed. A day earlier and Captain Scotton's rough voice would have called, "Less noise and more work aloft there," but though his face was grim and his eyes hard there was no rebuke. Nor would a rebuke have been justified. The work was not only done but well done. In an incredibly short time the main and mizzen masts were stripped bare, the fore-top-sails lowered and housed and all made snug aloft. Had they laboured for their lives instead of their play they could not have toiled harder.

The helm had been put up, shifting the *Regina's* head a point or two west that she might creep nearer shore, as Captain Scotton said, on the chance. But it was no chance. John Sharland had taken his bearings too well.

It was Captain Scotton who saw them first, the three rocky points showing at high tide with the camel-hump on the centre. But he gave no sign, only swept his glass further south: then he beckoned to me.

"Blair's at the wheel, keep yourself in hand, Young Madam," he whispered; then said, loud enough for all to hear, "Young eyes are better than old ones, but I think yonder's the stream that's charted. D'you see? There's a stretch of beach with a big cotton-tree in the middle, an' then to the south—why, Young

Mistress, if you don't keep a tighter grip of the glass than that y'e wouldn't see it, not if it was as big as the Thames at Greenwich."

And indeed my hands were shaking like a palsy. Believe me or not, it was not because of what might lie hidden in the after lazaretto of that wrecked stern, jammed between the walls of rock somewhere out of sight, but because of the man John Sharland, my father, who had sailed these seas, who had faced death in the shipwreck, death in the winning of the treasure, death in the keeping it, death in the hiding it. Suddenly—such are women—in the drawing of a breath my question of last night was answered and well answered : surely it was but a little thing that I should seek and salve what he had faced death so often to lay up for my seeking ?

What I saw, when Captain Scotton had steadied the glass on the rail for me, was a stretch of pebbly beach, perhaps three hundred yards long, perhaps more, with low, broken cliffs to the north, and to the south the twinkle of running water ; yet further south and the rocky barrier again took form, but bolder, more menacing than before. There, somewhere, lay the wreck. Midway along the beach, inland a little from the jungle-edge where nature strove with nature, rose a gigantic tree—a cotton-tree Captain Scotton had called it. Perhaps so, but it was John Sharland had so named it, not from any revelation of the glass.

"The place without doubt," I said, then turned to find Blair staring hard at me, instead of at the coast that lay ahead. While we were still half a mile off shore, with the great cotton-wood full abreast, Captain Scotton let the anchor go. There was plenty of water, but he did not know the set of the currents, and, like a prudent seamen, had no mind to cut

himself scant of sea-room in case the wind should shift to the east. That it might do so and blow a hurricane was proved by the gale that drove my father ashore. And what a war of cheering went up, as, with the foresail tacks loosed, the *Regina* rounded into the wind, now a hardly perceptible drift, and the cable rasped through the hawse-hole. For thoroughgoingness none can equal Jack, when he works he works, when he plays he plays, nor is there any make-believe about either.

But right in the middle of the laughter and the horse-play as they lowered the boats Mr. Cuthbert came aft with a troubled face.

"They want muskets and ammunition, sir," he said, speaking from half-way up the steps to the poop. "They say God knows what's in the jungle there, and besides they may shoot a bird or two for the pot."

"Which of them spoke?" asked Scotton.

"Harte, sir. He has been a grumbler ever since we left port, though I never sailed in a ship where there was less to grumble at." He looked at my lord as he ended and it was my lord who answered without waiting for Captain Scotton's opinion. This was no question of seacraft.

"Serve them out half a dozen muskets, three rounds of ball to each and as much small shot as they want: also half a dozen cutlasses. It's reasonable enough. I would ask the same in their place and shirk going without them. Mumbo-Jumbo himself might lie in wait in the thickets there. Am I right, Captain Joan?"

"It's policy as well as necessity to trust them," I answered.

But Captain Scotton shook his head doubtfully. "I won't say I like it, for I don't: but if it must be

it must be, and best to do it with a good grace. Keep hold of the ball if y'e can Cuthbert."

Even the faint drift of air had died away, and the set of the current must have been from the north for the *Regina* swang head-on up the coast. Never had I seen the water so dead: had oil been poured out to flatten the surface it could not have been more lifeless. Overhead the sun blazed out of a copper sky: only to the north was there a sign of cloud—a bank of dusky, rose-edged saffron that sat low down on the horizon. The heat was withering: the air was like the breath of an oven, the pitch bubbled from the caulked seams of the deck, the brasswork stung the fingers to the quick. Never had I dreamed of such heat. Not for the first time I blessed my lord's foresight and Mistress Babington's shopping.

But the fierce heat could not spoil the fo'cksle's zest in its holiday. As they tumbled over the sides to the waiting boats they were more than ever like care-free schoolboys. Even Ezra Plowden had shaken off his chastened mood, and I was glad to see him laugh and jest with the rest. And why not? If his crave was, as he said, to warm his bones once more before he died it was being gratified beyond cavil. And yet, grilling though it was, they must needs race.

The suggestion came from Cuthbert's boat, but who spoke I do not know. Instantly it found favour. Race? Yes, but for what? If Jack loves his play, he loves a gamble even better. Then, as they lay on their oars well clear of the *Regina* a voice roared,

"For first pick! Ready all? Now then, one, two and away! Row, bullies, row—row and be damned to you!"

It's my belief the twelve oars took the water in the one second—twelve oars but more than twelve rowers. Every man-jack in each boat, except the steersman,

tugged or pushed, straining to add his last ouuce of muscle to the weight behind the oar. All chatter died. From the look of the grim, set faces and clenched teeth one would say laughter had never filled their mouths. Like a great machine each boatload swayed together in short, quick jerks as the blades took water: there was no sound but the groan of the tholes.

As we watched, end-on, certainty was impossible, but Mr. Cuthbert's boat appeared to lead, then that steered by Bemrose and stroked by Blair drew ahead. Through the glass I could see Blair's face and its hot fury was horrible to look at. Further ahead their boat drew, further, further and yet further, stubbornly, doggedly: almost I could hear Blair pant. Suddenly he shot a glance across his shoulder to measure the distance and on the instant there was a mis-stroke: in upon one another they tumbled, a confused heap of limbs and oars and in a great shout of laughter all three boats ran aground.

Father Macdonald stood beside me watching, the beginning of a sour smile puckering his mouth.

"Who wins, Mistress Joan? And what do you think he'll choose—Ingots of gold or silver: cups, platters, dishes: diamonds, rubies; and if every man in the boat has first pick what will be left for the rest?

"What do you mean?" I asked, perplexed.

"Did you not hear them? They raced for first pick. Of what? John Sharland's treasure. They look on it as theirs already. For us the question no longer is how little do they know, but what do they not know or guess? First pick?" His face hardened into a mask of the past, the days of the '15, when he served Fortune and was no soldier of the Church. "It's a fool's trick to sell the lion's skin while the beast's alive." Then he laughed a little ruefully.

Mistress Joan, I think I had better go read Saint Thomas à Kempis."

Truly ancient fires smoulder long under the dead ash, but it is sorrowful when the flame flares up and scorches conscience. And yet, if ever I could have been of Father Macdonald's creed I think his humanness would have drawn me. A parson may walk with his head in heaven, but I think the one who does the most good is he whose feet touch common earth like the rest of us.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DINGHY

THAT day no regular watches were kept. Captain Scotton and Mr. Stenson both dined with us, while Hal played cabin boy, as Will Crisp was junketting ashore with the rest. Often taciturn, Captain Scotton spoke less than ever, but, contrary to custom, he sat on after the meal was ended, his little, hard eyes screwed almost out of aight as he stared at the chips of biscuit he was crumbling. Suddenly he came to a decision, brushed the heap aside, and looked up briskly.

"Orders to give," he said sharply. "How is the glass, Stenson? Look how it shapes and then take a squint at the weather. And you, my man," he turned to Hal, "up the foremast with you an' report how's all ashore. What d'you say when it's orders?"

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Hal, grinning and saluting.

"That's right, but listen now. They're not to know forrard that it's orders, d'you understand? Ye climb the mast to please yourself. You do it slowly and you take your time aloft. Which way do you go?"

"By the stairs, sir," said Hal, promptly.

"Good! off with you, now," and a twinkle softened his eyes. But only for a moment, then he grew so gravely silent that an expectancy fell upon us all. Perhaps the sullen heat had set our nerves on edge.

No one spoke till Hal's footsteps, wandering idly back and forth overhead, then slowly down the ladder to the main deck, had died away and Mr. Stenson returned.

"There's a droop, sir, and the mercury's cupped, but the weather's clear except for a smudge of grey to the nor'rard."

Captain Scotton nodded. "What's the fall?" he asked briefly.

"Almost two-tenths, sir."

He nodded again, stroked his beard once or twice, and turned to Dave.

"Can ye handle a boat, Mr. Catlett?"

"Yes." Scotton's curtness possessed us all.

"The dinghy's tied astern. Coax it round to starboard, inch by inch, so's they won't see you ashore. Take your time an' seem to be doing nothin'. Stenson, go forrard and keep them yarning to larboard. You've pistols in your bunk? Right! Put one in each pocket. You won't likely need them, but havin' them with you'll do no harm. Listen, now. So far as I know, all the men aboard are square, but if one tries to signal ashore knock him flat before he shouts—that's orders. Mr. Eliot, you'll stay aft on the poop, an' if there's real trouble—but there won't be—you'll fire the rabinet." He paused in thought, and when he spoke again his eyes were on me. "Have no fear for the boy, Mistress Sharland; he'll be safe enough where I sent him out of harm's way."

"You have some scheme, Scotton?" said my lord.

"No schemes, my lord, except that when a man has a thing to do he should do it. With Mistress Sharland's leave we'll go an' have a look at that wreck. Why not wait till to-morrow? says you. For one thing, we've the ship to ourselves, or mostly

so, and it's odds they may not see us slip away at all; for another, I don't trust the weather. Somethin' big's blowin' up. With your leave again, Mistress Sharland, you, my lord, Mr. Catlett and me'll go in the dinghy—"

"I shall go also," broke in Father MacDonald. Then he turned to me in quick courtesy, "With Captain Joan's permission, that is."

"But why not?" I asked.

Perhaps he had not been reading Saint Thomas a Kempis very closely after all, for his answer was to quote what had once been said to Lord Dunquester.

"Captain Scotton thinks there will be the devil to pay if I go. Parsons and priests, you know, are not lucky at sea?"

"It's nought to me," said Scotton, giving himself the lie by the grumble in his voice. "Do you understand what you've to do, all of you? For there's no use borrowin' trouble by blunders; it'll come soon enough. There they are ashore with muskets and ball this very minute. Mr. Catlett, sniggle the dinghy to the waist o' the ship on the starboard side. Mr. Eliot, stand you by the rabinet. Stenson, no signalling ashore at any price; you're in command."

Dunquester sprang to his feet, all the lassitude of the heat thrown off.

"Scotton's right!" he cried. "Why waste an hour? It's just a pity, Scotton, that you did not give these scoundrels rum enough to keep them ashore till to-morrow morning."

"And have murder done? No, thank you, my lord," answered Scotton gravely. "They'll be hard enough to hold, sober, when they learn the trick we've played them; but drunk—it would be hell let loose. Now, Mr. Catlett, slowly an' yet quickly, if ye understand? There's no time to waste."

"*Festina lenti*, but especially *festina*," said my lord, laughing. "You'll go armed, of course, Scotton?"

"Four muskets," began Captain Scotton, then his eyes fell on Father Macdonald and he checked himself. "No, three," he ended curtly, and what he added under his breath was between himself and his conscience.

Here came proof of that soundness of kernel and that humanness I have spoken of.

"If there's fighting to be done," said Mr. Eliot, his eyes also on Father Macdonald, "ye'd best tak me an no yon—yon—" But while he searched for a phrase at once courteous and uncompromizingly Presbyterian —a hard thing to find in the circumstances—Father Macdonald intervened.

"From what you have said at one time or other, Eliot, I think you favour the Stuarts?"

"And if so," demanded Mr. Eliot, flaring. "What has that to do wi' it?"

"Just that I was out in the '15, carving men's bodies while you fingered their bones. Dunquester knows all about it. We'll take the fourth musket, Captain Scotton."

For a moment Mr. Eliot stood staring, then he burst out, "Man, I aye thocht there was a sound spot somewhere about ye. Have your way, Captain, I'll bide aft by the rabinet."

Already—the skylight was at its widest, there was no stir in either air or sea—we could hear Dave slipping slowly forward, inch by inch, as Captain Scotton had bidden him; then came the soft rasping bump of the dinghy against the *Regina's* quarters.

"Four muskets it is," said Scotton briefly. "See ye keep your wits, Eliot." Turning he opened the case Mr. Cuthbert had re-locked after serving out the half-dozen guns the boats had taken ashore. "Make

your choice while I fetch powder and ball," he went on, taking down two at hap hazard, one for himself and one for Dave, I supposed. Carrying them in his hand he went aft and we heard him raising the trap to the lazaretto behind the mast.

"Are you afraid, Joan lass?" asked my lord, his hand on my shoulder as I stood beside them. But I could answer truly, No. Excited, Yes; tense-strung, perhaps, and with a galloping heart-beat, but who would not be? And in part I think it was the lowering, breathless heat, sullen and oppresive, that set the nerves quivering. "You have your pistols in your berth," he went on. "Take them with you under a cloak; they can do no harm, as Scotton says. They are all alike, I suppose, Macdonald? Then lock the case and give Scotton the key again. We'll go out by the door on the main deck."

But while I was on my knees opening my sea-chest where the pistols lay hidden a knock came on the partition, and Captain Scotton's voice called out was I within? Opening the door I found him not only carrying the muskets but also with a pick, two shovels, and as many axes in his arms.

"There's no saying how we'll find things," he said in answer to my look of suspense. "A deal of change comes in five-and-twenty years. Give me some woman's gear to hide these—not the muskets, the more they're seen the better. Aye, that will do." Taking the cloak I gave him he spread it on the cuddy table, wrapped up his load, leaving the butts of the muskets projecting, and caught the bundle in his arms, so as to hide the awkward bulk as much as possible. "Be speedy, Young Madame, if you please," he added and went out by the same door as my lord.

Nor was I long in following, with the pistols hidden under a light nithsdale I had used at night coming

down channel. All five were standing by the starboard bulwarks just forward of the tarpaulin-housed gun carriage. Captain Scotton had transferred his bundle to my lord and held the dinghy painter. From the other side of the ship came the sound of Mr. Stedman's voice, clear and distinct, but with a shifting expression, spinning some yarn, no doubt, for now and then there was subdued laughter; but no one was in sight—the galley deck-house acted as a blind. The outer air was hotter even than the cuddy, and I gasped as it struck me in the face. With a gesture Father Macdonald motioned me to carefulness and in dead silence I crept across the deck.

"You first," whispered Captain Scotton, and without a sound Dave climbed the side, slipped into the main chains, and so to the boat which Scotton kept hove short.

"Now you, Young Madam."

I followed more clumsily by way of the gun carriage, aided by Father Macdonald and Mr. Eliot, and Dave guided me to my place in the stern. Next came Father Macdonald, then the bundle wrapped in my cloak was handed down, my lord followed, and lastly Captain Scotton, coiling the painter ahead of him. Astride the bulwarks he paused, beckoning to Mr. Eliot.

"Wait till we're clear, then go forrad so as Stenson'll understand we're off; but don't stay forrad, stick to the rabinet. Load ready against accidents; all ye need is lying on the after hatch," then he slipped into the boat, the painter coiled in his hand. "Quiet all," he whispered. "Just shove us off with your hand, Mr. Catlett, the current'll keep us right," and inch by inch, without a sound, the drift carried us along the *Regina's* hull. Mr. Eliot waved his hand, his head disappeared and we heard the hollow clang of his feet as he went forward.

In dead silence, motioning with his hand, Captain Scotton directed Dave to take the after thwart, he himself took the bow while we filled the stern. The oars lay across the thwarts, ready, but he would not allow them to be touched. Presently, still drifting, we cleared the counter.

My first sense was of the huge size of the *Regina*, as the rake of her stern rose above us, and our own helpless insignificance in that waste of water, stretching upon the one side to the world's end and on the other to the low-pitched coast, now seemingly so much farther away. So, I thought, must a single soul appear in the immensity of God's universe, yet plainly to be seen as we. Then the northern horizon drew me, and I saw that Captain Scotton's eyes were fixed on it also.

The grey smudge Mr. Stenson had spoken of—I would have called it darker than grey—had deepened and broadened, shouldering higher the rose-edged dusky saffron that edged it till nearly one-third to the zenith was inky black. It was like the coming of some gigantic eclipse. Overhead the heat burned pitilessly! There was still no cloud, but round the sun a tinge of dingy copper showed in a faint girdle. From the oily water a fiery disc shot up unflawed, almost as blinding as its fierce original.

The current, or drift of the tide, or whatever it was, was very weak. After a full five minutes we were scarcely a dozen feet beyond the *Regina's* stern. Mr. Eliot had tramped aft again. After another northward glance across his shoulder Captain Scotton caught up an oar, rising to his feet, and with steady, noiseless sweeps, paddle-fashion, drove the bow round; then shrill and clear as the call of a bird came a cry from aloft.

"Boat ahoy!"

"Damnation!" said Scotton, sitting down suddenly, "I forgot the boy!"

"Boat ahoy!" cried Hal the second time, and shouted something I lost.

There was a pause, a rush of feet forward on the *Regina*, a row of staring faces showed above the rail, Mr. Stenson's among them. But only for a moment; one head disappeared followed by a second, there was a dash to larboard, a loud bellowing hail suddenly cut across and smothered, a scuffle and a heavy fall. In a twinkling the heads vanished, and the silence broke up in a hub-bub of clamouring voices through whose din Mr. Stenson's rose loudest.

"Out with your oar and row like the devil?" roared Scotton, nor was Dave the slower of the two: Captain Scotton had no need to hang waiting on his stroke.

"Why?" asked I. But he gave me no answer, only jerked his head landward, which I took to mean were they on their course. "As you go," I said and he nodded.

There being no rudder shipped I directed them, "Easy, Dave," or, "Pull, Dave," as the case required. Dave was the stronger rower, always edging us nearer the rocky coast that jutted out south of the river. A saw-toothed coast it showed itself to be, as we drew closer, a coast like the shortened fingers of a hand with the fingers spread, and abrupt-walled narrow inlets in between.

Always Captain Scotton kept his head twisted to the left, staring at the beach, but when I looked I could see nothing except little figures moving here and there. They were as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope for size, then an out-standing point of rock cut us off altogether. Once I looked back. Mr. Eliot was at the taffrail watching us, but

I saw no other sign of life. Once, too, I spoke, but once only for the silence of strained uncertainty possessed us; then it was only to say two words.

"Mr. Stenson?"

"Stenson will be all right," answered Captain Scotton curtly. "There's nothin' to hurt anybody—yet. Keep us on our course, Young Mistress."

"Everything will be all right, Joan," said Dave, and the look in his eyes told me he was not thinking of what lay hidden in the wreck.

Nor, indeed, was I, though every nerve was a quiver and little warm thrills kept running from my heart outwards like ripples from the middle of a pool. It was the adventure that stirred me, the swift action and the uncertainty, the imminence of revelation, the sudden, rushed climax coming in an instant, as it were, after all these months of waiting: that, and the thought how John Sharland had sailed these very waters years before and sailed them to destruction. Poor father! A noise like the roar of the gale that wrecked him, boomed in my ears as the racing blood throbbed in my excitement.

Sailed? No, drifted helpless—hopeless, driven whithersoever the violence of sea and wind listed; not a spar, perhaps not a mast standing, rudderless, a wave-swept hulk, the jest and plaything of the storm, spun this way and now that in a dance of death at the roaring sea's caprice, the terrific splendour of the breakers nearer and ever nearer with the sullen voice of doom in their crash. Poor father.

"He was right! by God! Sharland was right!" roared Scotton, and there where he pointed hanging on his oar, were the stern timbers of an ancient wreck wedged fast in an angle between the spread fingers of rock.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT HAPPENED ASHORE

MR. CUTHBERT must now tell in his own words the story of what happened on the beach.

I never saw a lot of men so pleased at the promise of a run ashore. Hot though it was, and hot does not begin to describe it, they worked like slaves to have everything ship-shape by the time the anchor was fast, so that not a minute would be lost. The only glum ones were those I picked to stay aboard, four Whitcroft men and three of the younger Jacks who had signed on at Hull.

Then Floost, the Dutchman, came and asked to be left behind. He said he was ill. It was the first I had heard of it and he had done his work aloft without shirking. I told him shore would be his best medicine; but he said he was afraid of the sun, so I let it go at that and told him to lie down in his bunk.

The boats were in the water in quicker time than I ever saw boats go overboard, then a water cask was slung into each. When I saw them I was sorry I had suggested filling casks; it spoiled the idea of a day off and there was no hurry: we had plenty of water on board; but being there I let them stay. Then Harte came to me; a regular surly dog is Harte, always with a growl and a grievance. Give him fresh beef for dinner and he would grumble that he was used to salt.

"What may we look to find in them woods, sir?" he asked civilly. "In the way of live stock, I mean?"

I told him I did not know.

"Ah," said he, rubbing his chin, "that's just it. God knows what wild beast or heathen savages may be there, and we with nothin' but bare hands. Mr. Cuthbert, would ye ask the captain for a musket or two, to be on the right side? And there's another thing, if we could kill a bit of fresh meat it wouldn't taste bad after all this salt grub."

That annoyed me and I told him he was above himself with high feeding, and that was the matter with him.

"Who's complainin'?" he answered, not so civilly. "But about them muskets, the long and short of it is, we've got but one life an' we're not goin' to lose it for want of a gun in our hands when they're stacked in the cuddy by the dozen. If you're shy about goin' aft to ask for them, why, we'll do it."

But I could not have them climbing over my back like that. Then, too, I had never been in these latitudes before, and knew no more than he did what might lie in wait in the woods. So I went aft, and —against Captain Scotton's goodwill I could see, though he did not directly object—half-a-dozen muskets and as many cutlasses were served out. But when Harte wanted to lay hold of them I told him to go to—well, we often say more than we mean at sea. It's the sound of the words we have in our mind, not the sense. I also told him—and it was more to the point—that we had guns enough, but if he thought differently there was plenty of room on the ship and he could stay aboard. That settled the question and Harte.

I steered one boat, Bemrose another, and Oscroft

the bo'sun the third, the muskets I kept between my feet. Then, as we nosed away from the ship, settling down in our places as it were, some fool in my boat called out for a race. I told them they would sweat enough before they reached shore, but they were so full of high spirits that nothing else would do them. A race they'd have, but there must be something besides wet shirts to show for it; a wager or a prize of some sort. A race for what? That puzzled them till someone, in Bemrose's boat I think, shouted to row for first pick, gave the word, and off we went.

As Mistress Sharland has said, every man-jack lent a hand, but not at first. At first only the oarsman pulled, with here and there one or two giving a shove. Harte for one, and even that old liar of an Its-ordained-Plowden. But others, seeing them shoving, joined in, and soon there wasn't a man but did his share. Their desperate earnestness was astonishing, no man spoke. Trant, who rowed stroke in my boat laboured fit to burst his heart and his dogged sweaty face, crimson in the great heat, was a sight to see. I would have called to him to ease up, but I knew they wouldn't heed me they were so dead set.

At first we forged ahead, and above the splash and rattle I could hear Bemrose swearing on my left.

"Do you call that pullin'?" he barked. "It's first pick; put your backs into it you slouchin' lubbers and be--" Well, he talked to them sailor-fashion and there's no need to repeat it.

What woke them up I don't know, but they crept level and then drew ahead in turn Trant's face was like the devil's own as Bemrose passed us. If he could have fouled them he would. Then Blair, who was stroke in Bemrose's boat, looked across his shoulder like a fool to see how much further they

had to go, missed his stroke, tumbled back heels over crop and sent all behind him spinning like skittles. Next moment we and the bo'sun grounded with a rasp fit to rip the keel off. Then there was a roar certainly, though not of laughter as Mistress Sharland says, but a bitter wrangling as to who was first and some jeers at Bemrose paddling in behind. I told them to quit being fools: there was fruit enough for everyone and who liked could take first pick. That quieted them.

As the tide was on the ebb we let the boats lie, and while some set about collecting drift-wood for a fire—there was plenty of all sorts scattered about on the beach—others unshipped the casks and sank them as deep as they could in the stream. There was no use filling them until the last moment, the water would only have gone mawkish with the heat and the soaking swelled the staves.

Soon they had a roaring fire blazing, a big pot slung over it, and heaven knows what all of a sailor's mess stewing. There's nothing Jack ashore loves like strange meats, unless it's strange drinks and these they could not have. Captain Scotton had put a keg of rum into my boat, but only a small one, big enough to give them a tot a piece, and quite enough too. I gave it into Oscroft's charge and told him that if any man got drunk I would hold him responsible. I told him, too, to see that the boats were kept grounded and no more, lest there should be any need to push off in a hurry. Had I guessed who was to do the pushing I would have left them high and dry and taken my chances of Harte's heathen savages driving us off.

What all went into the pot I don't know—odds and ends of fish from the river, driven to shallows and pelted to death, odds and ends of shellfish found

among the rocks. It's a mercy they did not poison themselves. I doubt if anything that had life in it would have come amiss, a snake perhaps, though even of that I'm not so sure.

Presently Harte came to me and said some of them thought they might get something better than the riff-raff that was being picked up along shore if they only had the muskets.

"What is there to shoot?" said I, and indeed in the dead heat the woods seemed as bare of life as Hull docks of a Sunday.

"Well, sir," said he, with the civility which had disappeared so quickly on board ship when he had not got his own way at the first asking. "You can see yourself from the tracks by the river that there are beasts of sorts."

That was true enough. I had noticed the footprints while the casks were being sunk as close as could be to the shade of the jungle to keep them cool, but what manner of four-footed creatures had made them was beyond me. As I have said, these latitudes were strange.

"Who want the guns?" I asked. He turned, looking back the way he had come.

"That lot up there by the casks—Blair an' Trant an' Bemrose an' Plowden."

"Hold hard," said I. "Would you leave the rest of the crew with nothing but the bare hands you grumbled at aboard ship?"

"Well, sir, there are six of us, an'—"

"Aye, just as many as there are guns? No, Harte, I'll give you three and three cutlasses, but no more."

"What are y'e afraid of?" he sneered. "Ain't there a score or more of y'e and a roarin' fire? What do y'e think'll hurt y'e?"

"See here," said I, and I spoke sharply, "if you're not civil devil a gun I'll give one of you. The score or more have as good a right to them."

He shifted ground at that. "I beg your pardon I'm sure, sir. I never thought but to be humble an' respectful as becomes my station; but we're takin' our lives in our hands goin' into that there jungle, an' all for the crew's sake, sir."

That, I knew, was a lie. They wanted the sport and the grandeur of having guns in their hands, but it was like Harte all over to put in a whine. In the end I gave them four muskets, two cutlasses, and some powder and ball as well as bird-shot. I remembered what Captain Scotton had said about holding back the ball right enough, but if there was danger at all it seemed to me useless to give them guns and no ball to load them with. Of course he grumbled, but I think he came off better than he expected, for his eyes lit up. Then, as he was moving away, I remembered another thing Captain Scotton had said.

"Go along the shore," I called after him, "and whatever you do don't follow up stream, d'you hear?"

"Why not?" he asked, turning round.

"Orders." I answered sharply, but giving no reason. What business was it of his to ask questions?

He stood staring at me, shifting his feet in the loose stones, then, with no more said, joined Bemrose and the rest who were waiting for him, and, without exactly keeping an eye on them I saw their heads close together. Certainly they did not move off, and presently when I was doing nothing very busily Blair and that fool Plowden came to me.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Blair very mildly, "but Harte says we mayn't go upstream. He says it's agen orders. If we may make so bold, sir, whose

orders? Not that we're disputin' them, no, sir; but we thought—" He broke off, looking at Plowden as much as to say, now it's your turn. Perhaps, not being accustomed to it, so much soft talk choked him.

"It's like this, sir," said Plowden, diving a hand aimlessly into a pocket, "if so be as 'tis ordained—"

But I cut him short, "Captain Scotton's orders," I said curtly, then bethought myself. "That's to say it is what Mistress Sharland says, though of course the orders are the captain's."

"Mistress Sharland?" said Blair, and the same snap came into his eyes that came into Harte's when he got the four guns into his grip.

"Aye, Mistress Sharland," I repeated. "I think her father knew the coast, and perhaps he found upstream dangerous, for she was very particular—'as much as they like along shore,' she said, 'but tell them not to wander upstream, not upstream at all.'"

"Thank 'ee, sir," said Blair, "we'll be very careful." Then he paused, shooting a glance at Plowden, "I suppose, sir, she'll be comin' ashore to-morrow with them Whitcroft chaps while the rest of us are aboard."

"Something of the sort," I answered carelessly, "along the coast now, as much as you like."

"Thank 'ee, sir, we'll be very careful," he said again.

Instead of going straight back to where Bemrose, Harte, and the rest were waiting, they went by way of the fire and dipped their hands pretty deep into the biscuit bag lying beside it. That meant they were not coming back for dinner, and Harte had yarned about the risks they would run for the crew's benefit! But I took no notice; to give every man as free a hand as I could with safety was what I went there for. Then, together with a man named Flight, they joined the other four, and when I saw them

hanging about palavering by the edge of the stream where the beasts came to drink as it slipped out of the jungle, I found a sudden interest in the *Regina* for a minute. Only Flight was there when I looked back; the six had gone and not across the stream either, that is, not by way of the coast.

The heat was something sickening. Half the crew had their clothes off and were up to their necks in the water, splashing and horse-playing. Most of the others were sitting in the shade half asleep, but taking turns to watch the cooking-pot and keep the boats grounded nose-on on the beach and no more. Then Will Crisp, tired of stuffing himself with mangos, slung a stone into the great cotton-wood whose branches overhung the beach, instantly there was a screech, and out streamed a flock of screaming parrots. That wakened the men with a rush, here was something to kill!

I let them have the two muskets, and a proper grumble there was when they found where the other four had gone; but not from all. Some—Flight amongst them—stood aside sour and silent. In any case the two were enough, inside of twenty minutes there were as many birds plucking for the pot; but when dinner was ready—and I think it was cooked as much from above as below—only one musket could be found. The other was missing and no one could say who had had it last; every man had wanted a shot, and Billy had given it to Dick and Dick to Tom.

I told them to get to dinner and never to mind just then, it would turn up, which of course was true. That it had been hidden I did not doubt, but it was all a piece of foolish cunning. How could they smuggle it aboard without being seen? And since they could not hope to do that, what use would it be

left to rust somewhere among the roots of the mangroves? But in spite of its folly it troubled me, for it showed that the mischief which had been swelling ever since the killing of Barker was drawing to a head, and that there might be more in it than we thought.

After dinner the men, for the most part, just lazed about in the shade, half dozing or smoking. It was truly too hot for comfort, and all heart and high spirits seemed fairly sweated out of them. Four or five, Flight and some others, wandered restlessly round the mouth of the river; once or twice they disappeared up the track from the drinking-pool but only for a few minutes. Every now and then a musket shot came from the jungle, never, it seemed to me, very far away, nor was there much weight in the reports, so that I judged they had come across nothing bigger than a parrot. When one of these shots sounded, Flight's curiosity bubbled up; he and those with him always straightened themselves and stood listening.

The air, it must be remembered, was very still, so still that it gave one a queer sense of somebody on the watch. I don't think there was a stir anywhere. The birds had settled back into the trees, the men had quit bathing, the tide ebbed like water sinking away through sand, so soundless was it; the one moment we were drowsing in the shade, half asleep, the next and every man was on his feet, scared. From the *Regina* came a hail, then another yell cut across in a hurry, and just aft of the foredeck I could see the rough and tumble of a scuffle. But what held my eyes was the dingy clear of the stern with the captain getting way on her paddle fashion.

I don't pretend that I understood what was afoot, for it would not be true, but there was someone who

did. With a "Blast it, we're done: stand by the boats and wait," Flight bolted up stream shouting "Harte—Blair—Bemrose" like a maniac, the names, nothing more, unless cursing could be called something. There was plenty of that as he tore his way through the bushes, breaking off to shout his, "Harte—Blair—Bemrose," and then curse again. But I had been right, they were not very far off. There came an answering shout, then a jumble of excited voices as Flight met them and back they trooped at a pelting run, every man of them talking at once and at his loudest.

Even then I did not fully understand. Naturally my first thought was that something serious was astray on the ship and perhaps that confused me. But in half a minute I saw that couldn't be. Captain Scotton was not the man to row away from his duty as if for bare life, and the dinghy was being driven through the water like a racer. Besides, he would have headed for shore and not round the point of rocks beyond the stream, and there he disappeared while Flight was still swearing his way up the jungle shouting for Blair and the rest. On the *Regina* everything was quiet: the only figure in sight was someone on the poop deck.

After the hail the men mostly stayed where they stood, puzzled and uncertain, waiting orders perhaps; but a few, four or five, made for the boats and there they hung, their hands on the gunnels, standing by as Flight had told them, as if for the recall.

But it was not the recall they waited for. I was a fool and blind not to see it sooner; I don't deny it, but Blair and Harte were clambering into one boat, shoving it off as they climbed, Bemrose and Trant into another, with Shard and Flight at their heels, and old Plowden lumbering stiff-kneed behind before

I understood, and then it was too late to stop them. Flight, I saw, carried the fifth musket. As it was, Plowden, half waist deep, was dragged sprawling into the hindermost boat—which in the end was Blair's—more because he held them back than because they wanted him.

There must have been about a dozen of them between the two boats, and the pace they drove along overlaid anything I ever saw. They rowed like madmen and never gave a fig for the heat. If I was slow in getting after them it was not altogether my fault. The men were bewildered, and to pile into the third boat the fifteen or twenty left ashore took time. Then, after we had pushed off, someone sang out that Will Crisp was left behind, asleep, and we had to put back for the little fool. Once under weigh I told the men to pull like blazes and loaded the sixth musket with ball: it was the only one left.

The wind had risen suddenly; we caught it on the larboard quarter three hundred yards from shore and I could hear it moaning overhead. But just then a shot was fired round the point and I forgot everything else.

CHAPTER XX

BLAIR SHOWS HIS HAND

YES! John Sharland had told the truth that night he went out with the tide. I, for one, never had doubted it. But in that first moment of verification and setting uncertainties at rest tears blinded me: after the one glance I saw nothing. With a strong sweep of the scull Captain Scotton turned the dinghy's head ashore.

"We might ha' guessed it: she's all to pieces," he said briefly. "Paddle in till we see her close at hand, Mr. Catlett!"

Then, clearing my eyes, I looked a second time. The wreck was caught in the pinch of the rocks well back from high water—common high water, I mean, not the high water of such an easterly hurricane, helped perhaps by a spring-tide, as had laid her there and then stove her in two. That pinch still held, but even my ignorance knew that what it gripped was a mere shell, a husk robbed of its kernel, and not what John Sharland had carried in his mind for five-and-twenty years.

Other gales had driven other wastes of water, just as tremendous, roaring up the inlet to thunder in mighty power upon the rocks. Little by little, or it might have been in one outrageous cataclysm—none could tell—the strength he trusted in had broken up in driftwood. The rails were shorn sheer away, the

deck planking ripped out to a splintered foot or two where the taffrail had been, the bulkheads gutted—only the ribs and the outer shell held together and they were washed high with sand and stones, the rubble of the sea's waste.

Poor father! Something of what hurt me—not the loss of the treasure he had made so certain of, had so schooled me to win and pinched himself of comfort that I might win: that, for the moment, was far from my thoughts, but something of my sorrow for his sake must have shown in my face, for Dave laid a hand upon my knee and smiled. Not as one who says in the meanest of petty triumphs, I told you so. No: there was nothing petty about Dave, and whatever he had to say he said that day in The Scaur's stillroom; and now, though he spoke no words, the smile and touch meant, It will be all right, Joan. I think there are not many men like Dave, he says so little and means so much: chiefly they say so much and mean so little. And with his touch still on my knee the dinghy grounded. All—recognition, sorrow, comfort—had not filled thirty seconds. My lord and Father Macdonald had held their peace: they, too, understood.

Captain Scotton leaped briskly ashore.

"We're not beat yet," he said, a fresh ring of confidence driving out the disappointment from his voice. "But there's no time to waste. These damned blackguards will be at our heels for first pick, and it's my fault—I forgot the boy."

While he spoke he dragged out the bundle of tools still wrapped in my cloak and laid it on the beach—a mixture of pebbles and coarse sand, with a slope of finer sand bedded in the hollow of the wreck. The first glance had told him that the tide was on the ebb: as there was not so much as a ripple the boat would

take care of itself. Unfolding the bundle rapidly he looked up, the light of battle in his little eyes.

"What sand grips sand holds: all's not done yet, Young Madam. But we may have to fight for it," he said tersely and straightened himself, the shovels in his hands. "Don't waste time in talk. I may be wrong, but even so take what I say as gospel and save the minutes. That scum is after us. Floost's hail'll bring them, sure as death. Up with you on the rocks there, Mistress, an' watch for them, but keep out of sight. Do you, my lord and Mr. Catlett, bide here: load the guns, all four of them, an' be ready. Be sure they'll come by water, and at the butt of this intake we have the pull of them." He paused, looking doubtfully at Father Macdonald. "Sir, can y'e dig?"

"I'll show you," answered Father Macdonald, "but why not three to dig and one to load. Then, when they come—"

"There are but two shovels, and in the loose sand a pick's no service," replied Scotton. "By your leave we won't argue. Up with you, Mistress, but keep out of sight: you can climb by way of the wreck."

Though he had worked aft by way of the fore scuttle Tom Scotton must have had some of the qualities in him which go to make leaders of men, for we obeyed him without further question, I first of all. Another man, less sure of himself, might have said, here is Lord Dunquester, let him shoulder the responsibility and take command. And a smaller-minded man than my lord might, in his turn, have claimed to lead by right of rank, have taken an edge against Scotton's dominance, and so ruined all. In a pinch of life or death I do not know which to admire most—the man of great confidence who risks

disaster unafraid, or he who might command yet is willing to obey for the common good.

The beach was firm under foot, as beaches are that are pounded by heavy seas: even the slope of sand was hard and compact. Full though I was of the need for haste I turned where once the taffrail had been and looked back, my nerves tingling with imagination. What a story they could have told, these weather-whitened timbers, and how the winds of God had blown that day, the same winds that had brought me in peace where my father had faced death—blood in the winning, blood in the keeping, blood in the hiding: and now, would there be blood spilt yet once more? That set my feet stirring. If I delayed, dreaming, my lagging might cause that spilling of blood.

To climb the rocks sloping upward from the wreck was easy for one who had scrambled over every ledgy cliff at either side of Whitcroft, and I was at the crest of the ridge running seaward before I remembered Captain Scotton's repeated caution to keep out of sight. But no mischief was done: except for the *Regina*, lying three-quarters stem on, the sea was empty. And concealment was simple. A ledge ran along the outer face of the ridge, four or five feet below its crest: with my grey nithsdale folded over my brighter headgear I and the grey rocks were as one.

That left the pistols naked in my hands. Back to my mind came an injunction John Sharland had repeated many a time, "Always be ready, Joan lass. God forbid you should have to use your skill, but if there's need at all there's need to be ready. No life was ever lost by forethought and many saved." Half mechanically, but not with the dulness of the mechanical, I ran over the well-remembered points

from muzzle to butt in both, found all in order, looked to the priming and glanced down below.

Dave and my lord had loaded a musket a-piece, then laid it aside on the beach ready to the hand and were busied over the second pair of guns. As I watched they finished and my lord spoke to Dave, who nodded. Both seized the boat, ran it clear of the beach and brought it ashore again broadside-on: t'would be better cover thus in the event of attack. Then they faced round, my lord towards the wreck, Dave to look up at me and nod with a smile in his eyes.

But having nodded back, smiling, too, I hope, though my spirit was growing a little cold with inaction, I turned to look at the two upon the sand slope. They had commenced digging about ten feet from the stern, over, I suppose, where Captain Scotton judged the after lazaretto to have been, and already there was a broad trench hollowed. They faced each other, working backward, and when six feet were uncovered began afresh widening the trench upon the lower side. In one sense it was easy digging—that is, the shovel drove smoothly up to the head with the one thrust and the downward slope helped its discharge, but the sand clung together like Jamaica sugar and was heavy to shift. Lifting his head Captain Scotton saw me watching them.

"Keep a look out, Mistress," he called, and fell to work again.

There was rebuke in his tone and I turned northwards to meet a stir of air for the first time. The inky blackness had swept upwards with a rush: its concavity as it over-laid the heavens showed clearly, burnished by the sun to a dull ochre streaked and stained by twisting, smoke-like spires. From far off, faintly, came the noise of a hollow booming. Then another sound, one I recognized, came down the wind.

"They are coming," I cried softly, crouching low upon the ledge.

Captain Scotton straightened himself. "Hold your hand," he said to Father Macdonald and stood listening. But buried as they were the chock-chock of the oars in the rowlocks passed overhead unheard. "How many are there—boats, I mean?"

But the sounds were too confused for certainty. "More than one, I think."

"You'll know soon enough," he said grimly. "If it's all three in the one errand we're done. But I don't believe it. There are some o' them honest. Listen again; but don't let them see you."

With the grey nithsdale so held that it could not flutter a betrayal I rose upon my knees and such a blast struck me that I turned back to warn them.

"The wind's rising very fast."

"Damn the wind," he answered pithily. "The wind's nothin', let it rise. How many are there?"

This time, for the double reason of nearness and the rising wind the sounds were clearer. I could catch the double rhythm distinctly. "Two boats."

"No more? Good!" he went on as I nodded. "We can hold two off easily, an' Cuthbert'll be on their heels with the guns—if he hasn't played fool. When they're in sight tell us how many there are aboard. Now, sir, we'll get on again," and he drove his shovel into the sand. Dave and my lord had picked up two of the muskets and were leaning over the gunnel of the dinghy.

I don't know how long I had to wait, two minutes perhaps—perhaps five, before I called, "Captain Scotton."

"Aye?" The rasp of the digging ceased and though I made no move I felt that Dave and my lord had turned to listen.

"Two boats, but I can't say for certain how many men. They are hugging the rocks so closely that I can't make out—about twelve I think."

"Twelve?" he repeated "We can hold twelve off all right, till Cuthbert comes," but he held his shovel poised in his hands and stood listening. Dave and my lord sank back upon their heels, their muskets levelled across the dinghy.

Rising so that the nithsdale showed no more than a grey lichen on the crest of the ridge I watched. They drove the boats along at a terrible pace, hugging the rocks as closely as they dared, but here and there little open spaces gave me a plainer view. I thought I counted thirteen but could not be quite sure. Bemrose was in the leading boat and it came as a shock to see Ezra Plowden at the stern of the second boat with Blair. I understood now what he thought was ordained when he escaped with his skin the night Dave brought his lying home to him. The second boat, with Harte in it also, was but a yard or two behind the first. Except the chock and splash of the rowing there was no sound. Then, as they skirted a broader patch of clear water I saw what set my heart trembling though only for a moment.

"They have the guns," I called down softly. "I can count four."

"Damn Cuthbert for a fool," cried Scotton. "It's a fight for it, is it?"

For a moment he stood staring up at me, his grey-bearded jaw stuck out doggedly, then he flung his shovel on the sand, climbed out of the trench and ran down the beach to the dingby. Seizing a spare musket he went on his knees at my lord's elbow, but reared bolt upright, head and shoulders above him. For a moment I glanced back. Father Macdonald was digging furiously. To see the sand

fly one would never have thought he had worn both sword and cassock; then, moved by what impulse I do not know, unless it was to be nearer Dave, I crept seaward along the ledge as far as the dinghy and beyond. Half a minute later and Bemrose's boat passed the point at a dash.

But the dinghy was seen; at a shout they stopped way so suddenly that Blair's boat was on top of them, and for a moment there was fierce confusion. Captain Scotton did not wait for it to clear.

"Keep off, or you see what you'll get," he shouted, flourishing a musket. "What's all this about, Bemrose?"

There was no immediate answer. Partly they were still in confusion, partly they had no plan ready, and the three muzzles raking them, for Captain Scotton had levelled also, had not entered into their calculations. But at last Bemrose, prompted by Trant, spoke up.

"The crew, sir, has decided—"

"Damn the crew," roared Scotton. "I'll do the deciding, my man, not a lot of measely—" But my lord intervened.

"With your leave, Captain Scotton, we'll hear what he has to say. Only, no inching in! You in the bow there, back water or I'll blow your head to pieces."

A wise man, my lord; he gained time trapping their ideas, and time meant Mr. Cuthbert, while the hot fierceness of his threat robbed the divided opinion of its seeming weakness. Captain Scotton gave way, at least in part.

"Spit it out, Bemrose, though it'll make no differ in the end; I'll do the deciding."

"What the crew says," answered Bemrose, "is equal shares."

"The crew," sneered Scotton, "call y'reselves the crew, do y'e? A dozen lousy thieves that Execution Dock's cryin' after! That's your equal shares—a rope, an' I'll see y'e get it, my man."

Again there was silence; through it I could hear the boom overhead louder than before. The foremost boat had drifted angle wise, that behind was end on, nose in against it. In both two or three were on their feet. Blair, in the stern, whispered to Plowden who, stepping across the stroke oar, joined the other, standing, and Blair, under their cover, crept forward, a musket in his hand. Kneeling on a thwart he slipped the muzzle between Plowden and Harte and took aim; by the angle I knew it was Father Macdonald he was covering. Half by instinct I covered him in turn, shielding the priming from the wind with the nithsdale.

God forgive me, but for a moment, as I saw the devilish fury on his wizened face I thought to kill him for the murdering dog he was, then, by some twist of memory, back came the day in the haggard; changing my mark, I fired. With a yell he jerked up his hands, flinging the musket into the sea, and tumbled in a heap on the stroke thwart, nursing his fingers. Back turned Harte, saw a streak of blood on Blair's knuckles, and caught up a second musket. But before it reached his shoulder there came such a threatening roar from behind the dinghy that Bemrose, leaning across, struck the muzzle down.

Even then there might have been murder done, for both sides were growing hard to hold, but down the wind came the boom of the *Regina's* rabinet. That kept all quiet except Blair, who was wringing his hands and cursing. Then the rabinet spoke a second time, and Captain Scotton pulled himself stiffly to his feet.

"If one of these blackguards stirs a hand, shoot," he said curtly. "What is it, Mistress? Can ye see?"

"It's a gale, I think. See!" I raised the nithsdale above my head, and heavy though it was, it trailed out in the wind like a streamer. A Wind of God it was, for it blew for peace. Beyond the point, the whole face of the sea swept south in little bubbling waves as if it was a river in flood. "Here's Mr. Cuthbert's boat," I added. Then the *Regina* fired the recall for the third time. Captain Scotton turned, his hand raised.

"Get aboard, men, or we'll lose the ship," he commanded. Then, as they hesitated, his voice rose truculently. "What are ye boggling at, ye fools? I'm doin' the decidin', as I said I would. Blair's had first pick an' it's burnt his fingers; who wants second? Your game's blown on and you're between the nutcrackers. Mr. Cuthbert's boat is behind you. Get to your duty."

"Is it bygones, sir?" sang out a voice—Flight's, I think. As he spoke the rabinet boomed the fourth time.

"It's get aboard or drown," answered Scotton, grimly. "Look at what's runnin' behind you."

With a sweep of an oar Bemrose in one boat, Harte in the other, swung the bows round and, with the automatic working of a machine, each man settled down to what he saw was a struggle for life. And yet, midway to the mouth of the inlet, Bemrose stopped dead.

"Will we give you a tow, sir?"

"Thank'ee an' damn y'r impudence," answered Scotton, "we'll fend for ourselves. Tell Mr. Stenson to heave short," and as the *Regina* fired for the fifth time, Mr. Cuthbert's boat rounded the point.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WINDS ARE STRONG

"DOWN with ye, Mistress," said Scotton, "quick as ye can; minutes are lives, almost. Help me slew the dinghy round, Mr. Catlett. Aye, that way. Now, out with her! Let her feel the beach, no more." He turned to hail Father Macdonald, but Father Macdonald was already wrapping up the tools in my cloak, while I, with more speed than dignity, slipped rather than climbed down the face of the rocks. "Bide where ye are, Cuthbert," he called. "Double-bank your oars. Bemrose was right, we'll need a tow, and it'll be a tough job. There's Stenson blazing again. In with you, Mistress, now you, my lord—both of you to the stern. Mr. Catlett, take your old oar, I'll pull bow. Shove off, you sir, as you come aboard. Keep to the bow, but squat low; it'll trim the boat better."

That was one blessing with Captain Scotton—there was no shilly-shally: in all that touched the sea he knew just what he wanted and how to get it. Not one second was lost debating. Nor was there waste of time when the two boats met. Swiftly the dinghy's painter was passed across, swiftly made fast, then:

"I heard a shot, sir?"

"Aye, no harm done. Put your backs into it, men. We'll give all the help we can, but it will be a tough job."

Just how tough I doubt if Captain Scotton guessed until we had rounded the point. The gale had risen so suddenly on a flat, calm sea that there was, as yet, no great weight in the water we ran against: the very fierceness of the wind kept the waves down. But the whole surface of the sea, streaked and mottled with foam, flowed down upon us, and at every dip of an oar spindrift flew in smoke. From that the dinghy suffered most. Before the last of the rocks were cleared we were soaked to the bone by the spray churned up ahead, Father Macdonald, crouching low in the bow, worst of all; and yet, but for the making of that spray, we might have given up the fight. Dave and Captain Scotton could never have won through.

Father Macdonald, as I say, came worst off, and increasingly as we drew to the more open sea. A swell was growing, less a wave than a rhythmical upheaval flattened by the gale. But flattened though it was, the drag of the tow rope pulled us nose down, and with every dip the spray spouted. I called out to wrap himself in the cloak. But he only shook his head, smiled, and slid lower in the bows that the wind might catch him less, though every inch down was an inch deeper in the water slushing over our feet. Dave, too, smiled and nodded when our eyes met, as if to say in his old, cheery phrase, "It'll be all right, Joan." That was at first; later, the dogged fight left him no leisure even to look up.

And it was a dogged fight. The grey-green water, lined and patched with foam, swept past us like a torrent as we drove into the teeth of the gale. Judged by its flow we out-rowed the *Regina* at her best, and yet our speed was a crawl. It broke my heart to see Dave's strained face, the teeth set and bared, the nostrils spread to aid the short, panting

catch at breath. I thanked God the sun was gone, blotted behind the inky blackness drifting from the north. The heat, too, had fallen: for that also I thanked God, but to watch that terrible struggle, myself powerless to help, was an agony. Then—and surely it was the mercy of the Almighty—there came a lull, a sudden drop of the wind almost to a flat calm, and that saved us. It is true the sea rose sharply once the flattening force of the blast lifted, but there was no longer the double power of wind and flowing sea to fight against and while the break in the gale lasted we gained rapidly.

"Hold your grip, Catlett," said Scotton between his shut teeth. "When it blows again it'll blow worse than ever," and Dave nodded, answering nothing. Even with the strain slackened he had need of all his breath.

Less heavily laden, and with no dinghy to drag through the yeasty water, Bemrose and his fellow rogues reached the *Regina* just as the lull fell. To do them justice they showed themselves no slovens getting the boats aboard. But I give them no thanks; they knew well enough a day might come when these boats would be their very lives, and it was the extra davits my lord had added in Hull that made it possible. Presently the clank of the capstan came down the intermittent drifts of wind. Then, while we still had nigh a hundred yards to go the gale, with a moaning roar, burst on us afresh. My lord saw it coming, a hissing line of boiling foam with a scattering to dust of the wave-tops, and called a warning; the hollow boom sharpened to a scream and the next instant the wind was tearing at us furiously.

But the *Regina* was first in its grip. When the blast struck her she yawed, staggering, straining at

her cable like some wild creature fighting against a leash; then the gale steadied her and she lay quiet, pitching in short, uneasy jerks. The only soul visible was Mr. Eliot, clinging hatless to the taffrail: the rest were busied forward, heaving short the anchor or snugging safe the boats. But I saw no more: the spray was grey all round and over us, stinging my face like hail, Dave I saw and Dave only. "My God! we're done," cried Captain Scotton in a muffled groan, though from the jerk in the tholes I knew he never slackened rowing.

Then the second miracle happened. We made no way against the hurricane, lost it, rather, for all the heart-bursting strain laid in to the pulling, and yet through the whirling cloud of spindrift the black bulk of the *Regina* crept slowly nearer; at first a blur, then a shapeless cloud, then the outline of the stern with Mr. Eliot squat on its edge staring down upon us; one moment he was there, staring, the next gone.

"She's adrift," shouted my lord. "She'll be over us in a minute. Look out for a rope, Scotton, for God's sake," and Captain Scotton, looking over his shoulder at the impending bulk, rapped out an oath he did not mean as he understood.

For an instant there was a shrieking whirlwind as Mr. Cuthbert drew us to larboard under the very stern, then came a rush of feet on the deck and Captain Scotton's oar went down the wind like a twig as he caught at a dropped coil of rope, passed it twice round the thwart and, still gripping the end, clung on to the tense length humming in the wind above him, gasping.

Of my own knowledge I can tell little of what followed. But somehow the dinghy was dragged to the mizzen chains, Father Macdonald and Dave

fending her safe from stoving at their own great risk; somehow, too, part climbing, part lifted, part carried, I was dragged on deck, but I know that before my feet touched the planks Captain Scotton was roaring out orders.

A fine seaman, those who knew him best had called him, and that day he proved it true. An anchor was lost but the ship was saved, though I saw nothing of it. I was in the cuddy, being dosed with the French cognac my lord had offered the midshipman in the channel. But with a rag of the jib he wore the *Regina's* head off land and got steeringway on her. Broadside to the gale she heeled as if a squall had caught her full-clothed and the water roared green over the lee ports. If Mr. Eliot had not closed them we would have been flooded. For a sickening three minutes she rolled half upright and back into the trough again, but little by little the head came round, and as the gale drew astern she steadied, driving before it like a racer. Had she lain nearer shore nothing could have saved her, but helped by the last of the ebb she slipped clear of the rocks. Yes, a fine seaman and an honest man: God send every hard-pressed ship such another in her time of need.

An hour later he came down to the cuddy.

"Mr. Cuthbert's boat is saved," he said, and there was more hearty cheer in his voice than I had heard for weeks. "It was more by good luck than good guidance for she was most blown aboard; but the dinghy's stove, sucked under the stern, and bashed like an egg-shell. That's nothin': we're cheaply out of it."

"What of the weather?" asked my lord.

"She rides like a duck: there's not a drop of water comin' aboard, and with clear sea before us I'm

not afraid of the weather. Here's what's more to the point. Tell me this, you three gentlemen an' you, Young Madam, for it's a thing I must settle without delay. There's been rank mutiny an' the will to thieve an' murder: what am I to do about it?"

"What is your duty?" asked my lord.

"There's more duty than one in the world," answered Scotton. He spoke tartly, as if the hint in the question ruffled him. "There's my duty to the owners, my duty to you who hired me; as to the law, if that's what you mean, south of the line there's no law but the law of please yourself or needs must."

"We saw that for ourselves to-day," said Father Macdonald drily.

Captain Scotton turned on him. "If ye came near your end but for young madam, whose fault was it? Ye would go though nobody asked you."

"But for Mistress Sharland? I don't understand?"

"Blair had you covered, and Mistress Sharland scored his fingers for him, knocking the musket into the water. I never saw a neater shot, nor thought to see it from a woman."

"Mistress Joan! And I have never thanked you! Of course I heard the shot, but I was digging—"

"Please—please," I interrupted, "we won't say anything about it: I was terribly frightened. Captain Scotton, is the ship in danger? I am thinking now of the question you asked."

"No, not as we go," he answered promptly.

"But if we were shorthanded and the gale held or grew worse?"

He gave no reply for a minute but stood glowering down at me, steadying himself with a hand on the back of the bench as we pitched; then,

"You're drivin' me where I don't want to go," he burst out. "There's a sort that nothin' short of

hangin' will keep quiet, an' we've got our share of them aboard."

"But that is no answer. You said just now there was a duty to my lord. I think that duty is to tell us the truth—would there be danger?"

"There would be—if the gale holds, worse it can't be."

"And do gales hold hereabouts, at this time of year?"

"If so, what then?" he said reluctantly.

"I think that answers the question?" As I spoke I looked up at my lord and Father Macdonald: Dave, I knew, would be of my way of thinking.

"Bravo, Captain Joan! It's not the first mark you have hit to-day," and my lord laughed at his jest. "That's the answer, Scotton. We can't risk casting away the *Regina* shorthanded just for the sake of knowing that certain rascals will drown in bilboes. But if I were you I'd disrate the carpenter and keep Blair and Plowden oft the poop. What's this I hear of a fight on board after we left?"

"There was no fight," answered Scotton sourly. And yet I thought he was secretly relieved at the decision. "Floost the Dutchman's another of the damned scum—hailed the shore and Stenson knocked him down, that was all." He paused, eyeing me again as he swayed on his feet. If the *Regina* was a dry ship she was also a lively one, almost every minute she staggered port-under. "Then I'm to say nothin' but just sit like a lamb under all that's come an' gone? Is that orders?"

Again there was silence, but I left my lord to answer: it seemed to me a man's business.

"It's like this, Scotton," he said at last. "We can't in decency save our lives by using these scoundrels in a gale and then hang them afterwards.

But talk to them, not as a crew, but one by one, and put the fear of death into them."

"Aye!" he answered grimly. "Much good that'll do when the gale breaks and we're back at our diggin' again."

"That will never be," I said, "never with my consent." At that they all stared at me, but Dave laid his hand on my shoulder and let it lie. The touch helped me to go on. "It's God's mercy there was not murder done to-day; that will never be risked again with my good will, never for my gain."

"But, Young Madam," broke out Captain Scotton, "it's my belief the treasure's there still. What sand holds sand keeps."

"Not for ten treasures will I go back—would it be worth murder? My father would not wish it. For him it was clean, would it be clean for me if murder were done? Never will I go back—never. And what is this but the Wind of God saving us from the evil? I'll risk it no more. Am I right, Dave?"

"Yes, Joan, dear," and before them all he kissed me on the forehead as I turned my face up to question him. It was the first time for more days than I cared to count.

Captain Scotton drew in a breath and puffed it out windily. Then he laughed with bluff tolerance.

"You're over-spent and a bit above yourself," he said. "When you've slept on it an' the gale breaks—though that I'll admit mayn't be in a hurry—you'll think different. An' don't let these rogues fret you. I'll warrant them harmless now we've got their measure." With that he stumped on deck by way of the after-companion.

"I mean it every word," I said as, not without difficulty, the door of the scuttle was closed against the wind.

"Wait," said Father Macdonald, and disappeared into his berth. But next minute he was back again. "Perhaps these may change your mind."

Three of the four articles he laid on the table were about five inches long by an inch and a half or two inches deep and broad, their colour a dull bronze-brown with greenish shades patching them in places; the fourth was much smaller, much darker, and no bigger than a finger-nail. Yet, as we all leaned forward curiously, it was it that my lord caught up. "My God!" he cried, holding it between his finger and thumb to the skylight overhead, "then Sharland was right!"

"Mr. Sharland was right," said Father Macdonald soberly. "Ingots of gold," and he pushed two of the bars to one side of the table; "Ingots of silver," he pushed the third in the opposite direction; "rubies—you have one there, Dunquester. Scotton hit the truth. I don't for a moment doubt but that the cups and platters and all the rest are in the sand heap."

Never had I seen my lord so lose his self-control. "And we'll have them all!" he cried, "every last ounce and stone of them, see if we don't! Macdonald, how did you find this?"

"Scotton spread the digging. I dug straight down."

"Trust a Scotchman—" Then my lord recollected himself. "Forgive me, Angus; you know I don't mean that. But, Joan, there are more where these came from and we'll have them out yet."

But I shook my head. "I meant what I said, every word of it. It's not worth murder. And there would be murder—sooner or later there would be murder. Can one of you deny it? If I have any right or title to speak for the ship, the *Regina* will never come this way again."

There was a silence, if silence it could be called

with the gale howling through the cordage overhead, the hollow roar of the green water blinding the ports with its rush, and the ship's timbers groaning and creaking with every wrenching plunge. Then, reluctantly, as if it was dragged from him, my lord tossed the ruby on to the flat of the table where it lay dull and lifeless in the half light, a poor thing for men to squander their souls to win. Dave's hand tightened on my shoulder.

"Who has such a right to speak as Captain Joan?" said Father Macdonald softly. "Dunquester, we'll back up Mistress Sharland if need be, you and I?"

For a moment he seemed to hesitate, his mouth hard, the excitement still hot in his eyes, then his face lit up with his old frank smile.

"Against man or devil, Macdonald, and, God forgive me, I think I smelt sulphur just now. Joan, lass, you are right. Not all the ingots ever were smelted are worth an honest man's life."

CHAPTER XXII

WE ARE DRIVEN SOUTH

"WHEN you've slept on it you'll think different," said Captain Scotton. I knew he was wrong, as the cynic so often is, but that night I slept little or none, and so could not put his misjudgment to the truth. That I was too over-spent to rest easily was true enough, but it was the hurricane and not the day's varied happenings that made sleep impossible. Never, surely, since she first took water had the *Regina* been so tested nor was there any easing as the night wore away; rather the terrific reeling lift of the stern grew heavier with the coming of daylight. Captain Scotton's second prophesy, that it might be long before the gale broke, seemed liker the truth than the first.

The deadlight was so hard fastened that even at eight o'clock, with the sun nearly two hours up, no more than a bare knife-edge of light won through. Twice I had heard Hal's voice in complaint, but though it was long past the breakfast hour no one had called me.

Dressing miserably, my feet encumbered by a tossed bewilderment of much that had no business on the floor but which I let lie—to stoop was to risk a fall, or a broken head against the partition as the *Regina* lurched—I went into the cuddy. The ports were sealed, the skylight blinded by a double

thickness of tarpaulin, and though it was broad day the light was thin and grey and cold, like the first glimmerings of a winter's morning. There was a cloth upon the table but nothing more, nor could there have been—it would not have held its place an instant. If any had breakfasted I had not heard them because of the noise within and without. At the best it had been a dry morsel in the hand. The two lamps hung now to this side, now to that, swinging as if they'd strike the deck itself overhead. and I yearned for the still-room of The Scaur. There was no sound of life, no voice, no footfall on the deck, nothing but the dreadful straining creak, the howl of the wind and the crash of waters.

With difficulty and some risk from the furious pitching, I climbed the after stairway only to find the scuttle fast, nor could power of mine move it.

I have been told that I have more courage than some, but I was never braver than when I held myself back from screaming and beating my fists against the panel, for I felt as if closed in a trap with a roaring world of terror threatening the unknown upon every side. Then I remembered the door to the main deck, and at even greater risk crept down the stairs again. It took minutes to reach it, watching the roll and heave of the deck for every move, and I could have shouted in an ecstasy of relief as it opened with the turning of the handle, then it clapped-to again with a bang as the stern sank away under my feet.

But the crash had been heard. As the *Regina* righted Dave opened the door and caught me, staggering ; then my lord joined him, and, one on either side, they piloted me where Father Macdonald was clinging to the ladder at the angle of the poop, but, as with the stairs in the cuddy, not without risk.

He stood back, grasping the handrail higher up, while I slipped an arm between the open treads and clung for bare life. From the end of the handrail a rope had been passed forward clear to the bows by way of the door to the cook's galley. This Dave and my lord held. But for it there could have been no traffic between the poop and the fo'c'stle except upon hands and knees. The whole waist of the ship was empty, nor was there any fo'c'stle watch.

"There are four men at the wheel—lashed," said Father Macdonald. Said? No! Shouted! Nothing short of a shout could have been heard through the medley of noises the wind shrieked in our ears. "Cuthbert's on duty, hanging to the shrouds."

"Danger?" I shaped the word rather than spoke it, but he understood and shook his head.

"Not as we go; no water is coming on board except what you see," and he nodded at the lash of spray that kept the decks creeping with wet on both sides but never filled the scuppers.

"Where are we?"

Again he shook his head. "They will get no sun to-day."

At that I looked about me for the first time. No, there was no hope of the sun. The leaden inkiness was without a break, yellower dead astern to the north whence the wind blew, but that was all. And how it blew. Every slack rope was bellied-out like a filled sail and from spar and stay and cordage there fell a whistling shriek; a rag of the foresail at the starboard lift was the only canvas showing. But it was enough to keep the head before the wind, though she swung and yawed violently as every following wave shouldered her to one side or the other. Overhead the mast-trucks raced across the sky in dizzying curves.

And the sea? It is always a marvel to me that I was not in terror of the wild welter raging on every side—the combing crests, the foam-laced slopes, the windless hollows where the *Regina* sank staggering into a solitary world to be measured by her own length, then with a heave of the stern rose angled upon a mountain ridge, still solitary and yet the life and centre of a universe.

But though an awe seized upon me there was no fear; this howling wind was still the wind of God, and the foaming wilderness stretching to the grey edge of the sky a world of His creation. Not even, when driven by a woman's restless curiosity, I dived under the rope and climbed the ladder a tread or two to look back, was I truly afraid, though a following wave, grey-green like marble and seamed with white as marble is, overtopped the mizzen yard before it slipped under the counter, tossing us into the howling wind! more I did not see for the same blast drove me back, and but for Dave I must have fallen.

Presently he asked had I eaten anything, and though I protested I had no desire for food he crept by aid of the rope to the galley; a sailor would have been hard put to it to keep his feet, Dave could not. On one knee, the taut rope gripped in his armpit, watching his time to crawl a foot or two as the roll or pitch served, he made his way in safety. Running before the gale as we were there was no lee side, the sea boiling up through either line of scuppers as we heeled this way or that, and the door was hard to open. But that, too, he achieved and soon returned with some salt beef between the split sides of a sea biscuit, his hair dripping from the pelted spray.

Before long I grew cold, and as Dave and my lord helped me back to the cuddy I felt afraid for the first

time. But not of the sea, the sailor's blood in my veins drove out fear of the sea; it was the heave and slide of the deck under foot that woke terror in me. A slip might break a bone or dash out life on the instant. After a wrestle with the door Dave followed me into the cuddy.

"Where is Hal?" I asked, as we clung miserably to the table.

"In his berth; and, Joan, would you not be better in yours? better and safer? This is both wretched and dangerous."

It was true. Already I ached from the straining and the buffettings. Not for one moment was there ease or comfort. Remain on deck I durst not, bide where I was, now jammed against the table-edge, now ground into the rail at my back, sliding here, sliding there, not one moment at rest, I could not. Nor was the bodily torture all. The sole light came through the spy-pane in the door to the main deck and the dim greyness, full of swaying shadows as the *Regina* reeled, frightened me as the sinking deck had done. But while I hesitated Dave spoke again.

"Joan, there's a thing you should know. My lord and Father Macdonald don't agree with me, but I know your courage better than they do; and to be told is your right."

"Oh, Dave! The *Regina*?"

"As if I would let you go to your berth with the ship in danger! No, Joan; it's ugly enough, but not so bad as that. There are four of the muskets missing."

Perhaps the swaying, coupled with the incessant turmoil confused me, for I answered stupidly, "Surely there are still more than we need?"

"You don't understand me: they are missing but not lost; Bemrose and Blair have them hidden.

Stenson knew nothing of what had happened. There was more trouble on board yesterday than Captain Scotton admitted. The knocking down of Floost for what was no offence was resented by the other seven, and Stenson had hard work to hold them. There is fine stuff in Stenson, though he looks such a boy. Then the gale blew up. When Bemrose, Harte and the rest reached the ship Stenson had his hands full saving the boats. It's no blame to him that he never gave the guns a thought, now they can't be found. There's not a doubt but they're hidden."

"But why?" Surely I was still stupid.

"Two reasons we think, to make a fight if Captain Scotton attempted arrest; you remember he flung Execution Dock at them yesterday; and to be ready when"—he hesitated a moment, then burst out, "Joan, dear lass, you'll hold to your word and never go back? For five years the treasure has stood between us. I have hated the thought of it, hated The Scaur, hated even Three Oaks because of the loneliness and the waiting and the fear that even at the end it would still be between us."

Loosening my hold of the table I clung to him. "Oh! Dave, has it been as bad as that? No, I'll never go back there—never again."

"Thank God for that! Thank God it will be The Scaur and Three Oaks—just ourselves and no treasure. But these others don't think so, they believe you will go back and so they have hidden the guns."

"But what does hiding the guns matter since we are not going back and bygones are to be bygones?"

"Nothing," he answered cheerily, "nothing at all. And now, Joan, I advise you to take to your berth. There's no comfort here and why risk bruises and broken bones?"

That, as I have said, was true enough. With the

deadlight fastened it was even darker than in the cuddy, but there was some approach to ease lying down with loosened clothing and wedged safe by pillows. Not that the groaning and the turmoil lessened: I even thought the pitch grew sharper as the day wore on, and when night fell I did not venture to change into my shift but lay on as I had lain. Yet, in spite of the ceaseless howlings without, the groanings and the creakings within and the bodily dis-ease, I slept a little that night, but woke early to no sense of betterment.

It may be asked, why, having said that the moods of nature were no part of my tale, I do not still leave them aside? I answer, this was no mood of the sea, but a true Wind of God and vital force in the South Adventure, not alone in the past when it saved us from bloodshed, but also in what was to come. In its beginning it had held back murder, now it gave men's passions time to cool, and, above all, surely it said, Not your will but Mine? So I read its past and present; the future—but this is the finish of the story, and it was this very Wind of God that brought it about. Therefore I cannot leave it and its force untold.

But, except very briefly, there is no need to tell the story of the miserable days that followed, days in part even more wretched than the very heart of the hurricane. For when at length the gale dropped as suddenly as it had risen, it dropped to a flat calm, leaving the *Regina* the plaything of the mountainous seas it had compelled. Then indeed there was danger as, with no wind to steady her, she rolled broadside in the trough till her spars dipped, or pitched helpless, now bow, now stern foremost, now at a hideous sickening angle. The noise of the blocks jerking was like a fusillade of pistol shots, and it

seemed as if the masts must go by the board under the strain.

But this was no more than a mood of the sea and, thank God, after a few hours of misery it ended in a sailing-breeze, eagerly welcomed though it too blew from the north, driving us yet further along the road no man wished to go. Setting no more canvas than would steady us Captain Scotton ran before it: with that heavy following sea rolling under the stern he dared attempt no other course. Though not a strong wind it had force enough to set breakers crashing that, catching us broadside, might have swamped us.

Twice, towards the close of those four days, Captain Scotton tried to beat north, but each time the weight of the sea said a plain no to the attempt: then the wind freshened, always from the same quarter or thereabouts, and again there was no help but to run before it. These were anxious and fretting days: further and further the wind drove us south, always south with a degree of westering in it, and never once did the sun break through at such an hour that we could fix our position. That there was ample provision of food and water was the one comfort. For the rest, it grew colder and colder, and none knew our whereabouts. At times the log had given our speed—six, seven, even eight knots, but the flowing wash of the following sea made computation difficult, and for days together, so fierce was the gale, it had been impossible to heave the log at all.

When pressed, through these days and the days that followed, Captain Scotton would put his finger on the chart in the vague waste of water and say, "There, or thereabouts:" but admitted that he knew nothing for certain except that daily we were driven further south. If closer pressed—Was there no land where we might run for safety? his fretted temper

would break out: We might be thankful we had our lives whole and a dry ship under us. As to safety, it was safer to be driven than to beat westward, groping for, God alone knew, what land, or how many miles away.

Then—it was the twenty-third day—Ezra Plowden, who had kept his long body as much out of sight as possible, came aft and said he smelt ice.

CHAPTFR XXIII

EZRA PLOWDEN SMELLS ICE

It is only justice to say that through these days of discomfort, privation, and uncertainity, often days of unremitting yet almost fruitless labour, because of frequent shifts of sails, the crew, both rogue and honest man, had neither shirked or grumbled. But when Plowden reared himself waist-high above the poop deck and waited, bareheaded, we thought a change of temper had come, though the choice of fo'cksle ambassador to ventilate grievances surprised us. Ezra Plowden could hardly be called *persona grata* with the powers aft.

He looked pinched and very old as he stood half-way up the ladder. The poop had been forbidden him and he did not venture further, but stood there beckoning to attract attention. It was miserably raw and cold, a day of grey skies, a grey sea that broke angrily, and light biting airs veering from north to north-west; a mist lay ahead, low down upon the water.

"Well, my man?" Captain Scotton threw the interrogation at him almost truculently, but Plowden only knuckled his forehead with a submissiveness he, no doubt, knew to be ordained.

"Begging your pardon, sir, I'm sure, but it's my duty to tell you that I think there's ice ahead."

"Ice?" Over Plowden's bare head Captain

Scotton peered into the low-hung bank of mist. "I see none."

"Nor I, sir, but I smell it."

Captain Scotton turned. "This old fool says he can smell ice," he called out and laughed jeeringly.

We Whitcroft folk had been near the wheel: taking this as an invitation we moved forward in a group.

"Ice?" repeated my lord. "Where away, Plowden?"

Plowden turned, waving an arm vaguely southwards. "I can't just say where, your worships all and Young Mistress, but I smell it for certain."

"Ice!" cried Scotton, "how can any man smell ice?"

No one answered him, but Dave said, "You have been round this way before, Plowden?"

"I don't know exactly about this way, your worship, 'cause, ye see—where are we?"

"You may leave that to Captain Scotton; but you were round the Horn in that Danish 36 gunner Captain Cook found in Sierra Leone?"

"I've been round the Horn, your worship, if that's what you mean. I don't see what the rest has got to do with it."

"Just that this time you're not travelling by way of Santa Carlos and Mercadello are you? You've been among ice before?"

"It's God's truth, sir—more than I wanted."

"I believe you. With your permission, Captain Scotton, I think he may go forward again?"

Scotton nodded surlily and Plowden, with a parting submissive knuckling of the forehead backed down the ladder. He was miserably, quite insufficiently, clothed, and again his pinched look of worn age struck me, moving me to pity. It was true he had behaved like a scoundrel, but he had repented and was making

atonement as best he could ; can faulty human nature do more?

"Ice!" repeated Scotton contemptuously, "and he smells it! How could there be ice?"

"Why should there not?" answered my lord. "As Plowden says—where are we? As to his smelling it, that is his way of putting it, but I have heard that a kind of sixth sense develops in some men who have been through ice. My belief is Plowden is right."

"Let him be right, what then?" said Scotton irritably, "we can't go about, we can't shorten sail any more and yet keep steering way. Ice? Damned if I see ice."

Nor could anyone, and on the fo'cksle they were clustered thick as hiving bees, staring into the mist which now began to creep about us in trailing wisps, raw and bitterly cold. From aloft it was no better, Mr. Stenson himself climbed almost to the main truck but there was nothing—nothing but the grey mist, the grey sky, the grey tumbling sea and the birds.

That was one strange thing, the birds had certainly increased in numbers and varieties. There were not many of the huge creatures Ezra Plowden called the alcatraz, but others of the same sort circled round us in plenty, five times the size of our English gulls, some white, some grey as the sea, some sooty black. Without the quiver of a wing they outsailed us. Like ghosts they came, like ghosts they went, born of the mist and received back into it again. Plowden called them the souls of drowned sailors and I partly believe it. Then from crest to crest the petrels fluttered, black, mouse grey, and snow white, timing the rise and fall of the roughest wave without mistake yet never an inch to spare. If those larger were dead sailors surely these must be the Will Crisps, so light of

motion were they, so quick in their flitting and so heedless of danger.

For the first time since casting anchor at Los Reyos, Captain Scotton seemed to lose hold of himself. The wind and the sea were enemies he had fought unafraid ever since the day he began to work aft by way of the forescuttle. Men he could face, as he had faced Bemrose and Blair with their triple odds, but the threat of this new force hiding itself out of sight in the grey mists, this unknown foe whose strength he could not gauge broke his confidence. In his uneasy perplexity he tried every trick of his seamanship to beat north, but the slow drift of the wind and the sullen, breaking seas baffled him: he shortened sail to reduce speed, only to make sail again for sheer safety's sake, wrecking the crew's confidence by his chops and changes as his own was wrecked. And all the time he swore there was no ice, there could be no ice, because he saw none—which, as Father Macdonald said, was the blind logic many a fool had used to prove that there is no God.

As the grey day drew to the greyer night, both sea and wind fell, the latter first. It took all the *Regina's* sails set to keep her running with the breakers she dared not risk abeam, nor, in that night within a night—for the mists had thickened—dared Captain Scotton budge from the forward course, let it lead where it might. He still maintained there was no ice and could be none, but admitted that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know, and somehow Ezra Plowden had put in his heart a fear of the worst of all the many devils of the deep.

It was a weird and solemn sensation plunging through the silence of the grey night. The sea heaved and tumbled about us like a flood of lead seamed and strewn with grey snow: the very sails were ghostly in

the dimness. None spoke, but all strained, listening. And the only sounds were the flap of canvas, the jar of rope, the cry of a sea-bird or the whispering crash of a breaker topling softly in upon itself.

Then the wind died utterly, or almost utterly, and Captain Scotton, obsessed by his dread of the unknown, stripped the *Regina* to the foresail and under naked spars she plunged blindly on her way, the dull white patches of spreading foam, as the crests crumbled, the sole relieving light in the darkness. The ship seemed the one living thing in a desolate, dead world, and we the watchers of its blind progress to some inevitable destiny, helpless to shape the end or guess at its approach. So, it may be, the angels watch us plunge onward through our night of dim vision, knowing as little what the eternal forethought has laid up at the close.

Most unwillingly I was at length persuaded to go below because of the rank, cold damp of the mist, but, as on the first night of the hurricane, I dared not shift my clothing. Dave and the rest, except Hal, remained on deck.

In my berth it was deathly still. At times a sound like the sigh of some sea-monster reached me, then I knew that a breaking wave had foamed under the counter, spreading itself in a wide, glimmering sheet on the leaden grey. But these grew fewer and fewer, then ceased, and as the silence deepened I felt the sea was dying down as the wind had died. Nursed by the quiet, I slept.

The cold, I think, woke me. Morning was very dim in the cabin and I roused slowly ; but soon the altered motion told me we had changed our course, the *Regina* no longer lurched with a heavy, forward-running plunge but rolled gently broad-side. At last the southern drift was broken, and we were

running either east or west, though at no great speed; the quiet lap and suck of the water along the ship's side whispered that much through my drowiness. Then above the liquid sibilance a new sound broke, a tapping, or scratching, as of finger nails at the water-line, and I sat up, suddenly broad awake, remembering Ezra Plowden—ice!

Hastily pulling on my boots I wrapped the nithsdale round my head and ran on deck. The fog was gone, the air bit very keen, and all the standing gear hung white with hoar-frost. The *Regina* was so close hauled on the starboard tack that she made but little way in the light air, her drift was probably as great as her speed. Overhead it was still grey. All these things I divined at a glance rather than saw in detail. At sea the faculty of comprehending without analysis develops through sheer necessity.

Mr. Cuthbert was on duty; he came to meet me from the break of the poop as I half stumbled on deck in my haste.

"Ice?"

He turned and pointed forward on the starboard bow. "Yes, there, and more than we want. Old pre-ordained Plowden was right after all."

"There? but it must be nearer than that? I heard it grate down below."

Surely of all men sailors take their lives in their hands with the least heed? Perhaps in the nature of things it must be so, perhaps if it were not so England would never have been the England sailors have made her.

"Oh, that?" he said with a kind of tolerant contempt, though it was the first time he had ever sailed in such company. "That's nothing—nothing at all. What matters it there," and again he turned forward, but only to turn back again immediately

with a sharp order to the helmsman which swung us a point off the wind.

The shift cleared a view of the ice from the tangle of the fore rigging, a lurching roll cleared it yet further and my heart staggered in me, then I shivered with a great awe. Never had I imagined such a sight. How far off the berg was I do not know, but it lay on the rolling waters like a mighty rock, solid and motionless. In colour it was greyish white, lighter above, darker at the base, pitted and holed along the water line by huge caves. Its top was flat —flat as a table, its sides sheer; against its northern coast the waves broke as against cliffs, but that the sea had fallen the spray must have spouted as it spouts from Whitcroft cliffs in a north-east gale.

A second but lesser island of ice lay to the south, in the north-east a third cut the horizon; between, and all round the *Regina*, the sea heaved with broken fragments, mostly of small size and worn to fantastic shapes by erosion and the warmer northern currents. But Mr. Cuthbert was right, compared with what lay in the distance these counted for nothing, though it was little wonder that Ezra Plowden should smell ice, if such a thing be possible at all.

"What will happen?"

Mr. Cuthbert looked round at me with a laugh, though there was no laughter in his eyes. But before he could answer the *Regina* had so swung into the wind that her sails shivered, and with a rapped out oath he bade Hoggett, who was steering, keep her full. It was the first time I had known Mr. Cuthbert to swear when I was present. That told me how anxiously he was fretting.

"Fuller," he said, staring ahead, "fuller yet, damn you." Then, after an uneasy glance aloft he turned to me.

By his face I knew he was going to lie for my comforting. Why, in times of stress, men should think it necessary to lie to women I do not understand. We may sicken at ugly sights at times, but we fear death as little as men do and I think we bear privation, pain, and disappointment better. I stopped him before the lie came.

"I was not afraid at Los Reyos, not of Bemrose and Blair, I mean." And it was true in the same sense I meant him to understand; my fear had not been for myself.

"By God! you weren't," he answered and meant no irreverence. "What will happen? I don't know and that's the plain truth. The sea's going down, I think the wind's falling; there's ice north and south of us and we don't know the set of the currents. If it falls calm, as I believe it will, there's not a sailorman living could tell you what will happen."

"But what do you think?" I persisted.

He glanced slowly round the horizon before answering. It was now broad day, though how high the sun had risen it was hard to tell, so grey was it overhead. Certainly the sea was quieting, and light as the wind had been when I came on deck there was already less force in it. Stooping he pointed under the foot of the foresail as the *Regina's* bows lifted.

"D'you see that lane of clear water ahead? That's our course. Somehow, I don't know how, the wind keeps it open; when it drops it's my belief the lane will close."

"And then?"

"She's a tough old hooker," he answered cheerily. "Don't you be afraid till I am, Mistress Sharland."

"That will be never," I said, and this time his laugh rang true.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BERG WITH THE GREY PATCH

In both his expectations Mr. Cuthbert proved a true prophet. Little by little the wind fell, and as it died away our narrow world of open waters contracted, till by night-fall the broken ice hemmed the *Regina* in upon every side.

Scenes of greater desolation may exist elsewhere in the world but they are beyond my imagining. I would rather a hundred times over have faced the hurricane, with its shrieking war and instant threat of destruction, than this stillness wherein we spoke in whispers as if the world itself lay dead, and a word above the breath was an outrage upon reverence.

That there were noises upon every side, the grinding groan of floe on floe as they jostled edges, the crackling thunders of splitting bergs and the hollow plash as the icy rocks, toppling from the upper crags plunged into the sullen sea, did not make it less a world of the dead. Without doubt that undiscovered country which lies beyond the bourne has a language of its own, voices as yet beyond our ken and custom. Only when these are understood will it become a land of the living to us, dear and welcome as the earth. So was it now: though the desolation was peopled with sound it stirred no responsive chord of life within us—the groaning world lay dead, and in and out of the dimness overhanging its desolation

souls of drowned sailor-folk flitted on noiseless wing.

For four horrible days we lived this motionless life-in-death, the sole change the slow shift of the *Regina's* head, now north, now south, in the imperceptible drift of the floes. Then the woman's fortitude in me broke down: flesh and blood, my flesh and blood, could endure it no longer. At any risk and almost any cost I must have movement, must ease my chafe of soul in action or else go mad. A grey patch against the side of a large berg gave me the idea of a vent. How far distant it was I could not guess. Captain Scotton and Mr. Cuthbert differed widely in their estimates but the conditions were unusual. Certainly it was further, much further, from the *Regina* than the beach had been as she lay at anchor. Nor could we decide what the grey patch was; the face of the berg, angled away from us, foreshortened it to a blur, and my suggestion was that we should go and find out, but by we I meant Joan Sharland.

But Captain Scotton refused with little hesitation and less courtesy: he would risk no man's life on a foolish woman's mere foolish whim. That stung Dave into retort. He had opposed me utterly but now, and not for the first time, he flung his better judgment to the winds for my sake.

"No risk of yours," said he. "Here are three who will go; if more are needed we will call for volunteers."

"Aye," answered Scotton, "but why go at all?"

"Because Captain Joan commands," said my lord so promptly that no one could have supposed that five minutes before he had opposed me even more strongly than Dave. "Then, too, why should there be that grey patch at all? Salt water does not breed

such things. It's our plain duty to find out its meaning. Muster the men and talk to them. Three will do. That will give four to row and two in the bow with boat hooks to fend off loose ice."

"You are owner, so I'll muster the men," answered Captain Scotton sourly, "but I'll take neither hand nor part in such a fool's job."

Nor did he. On the contrary, he did his best that no other man should have hand or part in the fool's job either. For, with the crew huddling in the waist like a flock of sheep, only more cold and miserable, having no sheep's wool to cover them, he lost no time in making his opinion clear.

"His lordship here has a word to say to you, but mind you, my men, it's not orders; d'ye understand?" Then he pushed his hands into his pockets and turned away aft.

I don't blame his temper; the fret and disappointment of the last month were more than enough to sour the temper of a sweeter man that Captain Scotton. All the same he should either have refused to muster the men at all, or have said nothing which hinted his prejudice. Jack at sea is cleverer than Jack ashore and knows well how the cat jumps.

"My men," began my lord, "Mistress Sharland has a mind to have a boat out, but it's not the ship's work, so, as Captain Scotton says, there are no orders. Three of the crew are needed to go with ourselves: who will volunteer?"

They stood dumb as the sheep they looked. Better than I they knew the risk, and yet it was not the risk that held them back. Danger and they had been sailing-companions too many years for a risk of their trade to cow them, but to run foul of their captain, to cross his hawse, as they would have said in their sea jargon, and for no gain seemed a fool's

game to play. I felt then that my woman's whim had gone too far and might breed ill-blood where, God knows, there was ill blood enough already. But when I whispered to my lord to say no more about it he shook his head with a vexed impatience I understood. He had his pride, though he rarely showed it. This had passed beyond a woman's whim and was a struggle now between Captain Scotton and himself.

"We will go alone if need be," he said harshly but with a plain suggestion of contempt through the harshness. At that Hoggett stepped forward. "Good!" he went on, "they breed men Whitcroft way," and that drew two more Whitcroft hands. Then, before my lord could speak again, Blair joined them, saluted civilly, and stood looking up at us without expression on his wizened face. The scars on his knuckles showed red through the salt tan.

"I said three were enough," began my lord curtly: then he seemed to recollect himself, for he stooped suddenly, leaning forward and across the rail. "Bring your musket with you, Blair, and I'll take you with us."

"Musket? I have no musket, Sir," he answered, giving my lord back stare for stare.

"Egad! that's true! You dropped it overboard! Very careless of you, Blair. Bring Bemrose's then, or Harte's? You might as well. They won't be wanted as we are not going back to the wreck. No," he went on, answering a flash that looked out of Blair's eyes an instant, "Never again, so you may as well bring the musket, or, better still, all four of them. You won't? That ends it: there are three before you, Blair." He straightened himself, raising his voice. "Over with the larboard quarter boat and rig the ladder for Mistress Sharland, lively now men. This time it's orders."

But though there was obedience there was no alacrity. In a great pretence at speed they sprawled and tumbled over one another doing next to nothing. For one who helped there were three who hindered. Every rope that could foul itself, and some that could act, went into a snarl. But when, after much palpable fooling, the falls jammed, Captain Scotton could contain himself no longer. He was not blind to the pretence and its purpose, but he was too good a seaman to abide such botching.

"Damme," he roared, "do it ship-shape an' not like lubbers. There's not a measily gutter-pip long-shore-man that wouldn't handle a boat better nor that. Who's in charge there? Hark'ee here, the lot o' y'e. If that boat's not in the water in less than five minutes I'll come down an' take a hand. Know me, eh?"

The last interrogatory, slung down in a truculent snort was spur and bridle in one. Know him, did they? Aye! and his heavy fist! Like magic co-ordination came out of chaos and in less than his limit of time the boat was alongside, nor was there any delay rigging the ladder.

"Thank you, Scotton," said my lord. "You know how to handle men." He held out his hand as he spoke and as Scotton took it the soreness between the two passed.

"If I didn't," he answered grimly, "I would be swabbing decks to this day."

When I said that ice hemmed in the *Regina* on all sides I did not mean that she was iron-bound by it. Whether it was usual that there should be ice there at all in the spring of the year, or whether it was a vagary of nature such as comes sometimes in the north, even Father Macdonald did not know, but being spring it was wasting slowly, and there were

always little lanes and pools of clear water breaking up the floe. Through these we pushed cautiously, sometimes with oar's room sometimes not. Hoggett and my lord stood in the bow, each with a boat-hook, fending off the broken fragments or inching the boat along as occasion called: the rest rowed, while Hal and I sat in the stern wrapped in cloaks. Dave was loth to bring him, but Captain Scotton said, with grim humour, "Better take him: he roused murder the last time he was left behind," and the boy's hard pleading gained consent.

It was less cold than I feared. The ice, of course, gave out a sense of chill, but there were flaws and pockets of warmer air: the breath, perhaps, of that spring whose existence we found it so hard to credit. Because, it may be, of this mildness the waste from the icy face of the berg-cliffs was greater than any day; not five minutes passed without its roar and spout of spray as the fragments took water.

A straight course was impossible: needs must that we follow the open water and if the berg with the grey-black patch was two miles away, as some said, we must have travelled three or more curving out to face it before my lord startled us all with a cry that drew me to my feet staring forward, a hand on Dave's shoulder to steady myself.

"My God! A ship!"

A ship? The blood seemed to rush to my heart in flood then ebb away again, leaving me cold and shaken. A ship buried like a dead thing in the ice—was this to be the end of the *Regina*? The thought ran through me like a shiver as I traced the shape and bulk of a hull behind the veiling of ice and frozen snow that hid and yet revealed, like a sheet across a corpse. A hull, but no such hull as I had ever seen, high in the bow, high in the stern, low in the waist or, at least,

low by comparison! that much was clear though the over-lying ice plastered against its broad-side blotted out details. No masts were visible.

"Give way," said my lord and, each man staring across his shoulder, we inched forward, all silence till he spoke again, this time to Father Macdonald. "How old, d'you think?"

"From Drake's time, or earlier: look at the rounded bows. Can we get on board, Dunquester?"

My lord made no reply, and little by little, threading the narrow lanes of dark water, we crept into the shadow of the ice cliff that rose as sheer as any cliff of stone sixty feet or more above our heads. Given the sparkle of a clear sun, with enough warmth to cleanse away the coating of frozen snow and lay bare the virgin ice, the beauty and splendour must have staggered admiration. But the dull crystals, frozen and thawed a score of times to a sordid grey, robbed it of its grandeur. Only the greatness and power of bulk remained, a power that could have crushed the *Regina* as one cracks a rotten nut, a greatness that held this galleon of a bygone age in its embrace more easily than I could hold the paper boat of a child's plaything. Here and there—one lay opposite us as we drew under the ascent—deep caves sloped inward and downward, steel-blue with a glorious emerald glow where the upper light refracted unsubdued through naked ice. Very cautiously we drew abreast the prisoned hulk and stayed.

My lord roused himself like a man whose senses had been far away.

"What was that you said, Macdonald? Get on board? We'll try at all events. Hand me an axe."

Some tools were in the boat in case of emergency, amongst them a crowbar and a couple of broad-

headed hatchets. Taking one of these, the boat being braced against the face of the berg, which here was rough and fissured, my lord hacked standing-room on the ice, midway along the waist of the grey black hulk, and then began to cut steps upward, shaping their surface downward and inward to secure a sure foothold. He worked quickly, aided alike by the angle of the fissure and the nature of the ice, compacted as it was rather from frozen snow than water. Midway he paused, as much, I think, to ease his mind as his muscles.

"What is your idea, Macdonald?"

But Father Macdonald shook his head. "It is all guesswork. Maybe she was blown south as we were, maybe she was heading for the Horn, dismasted by a gale and driven into the eternal ice a wreck as another wreck we know of was driven ashore. But not at this time of year: in March perhaps, or April, for the winter gripped her and froze her hard where she lies. Then—" He paused, his eyes wandering to the great white-breasted birds floating, skimming, sailing, through the air overhead on moveless wings. Perhaps Plowden's theory shaped his thoughts. "Then, after a hundred years or more, the ice gave up its dead as the sea will one day give up hers."

"Why?" I asked, as he paused again.

"You mean, How?" he answered. "There is no certain answer to God's whys; nor is there to your how? What do we know of the secrets of the Pole? Perhaps the ice always pushes northwards, perhaps some terrific force in nature, an earthquake in the depths, wrenched away the whole ice fringe, cracked it in fragments and sent them sailing." He glanced up at the grey hulk, "And the poor souls who manned her, what an end theirs was in the dead silence, the long bitter cold and the darkness.

Hugging the berg as we were, the air was desperately keen compared with the warmer breath of the open sea, but it was not the aching cold that made me shiver as Father Macdonald ceased speaking. Poor souls! What an end theirs was! Aliens and strangers, long dead though they were, I could have wept for pity of their loneliness and despair, dying by inches sealed fast to the eternal ice and the terror of the endless night closed in upon them.

Dave saw the look in my eyes, for he turned to Lord Dunquester.

"We'll either go on or go back," he said briskly. "Shall I take my turn with the axe?"

But my lord would not consent, nor was he long in hacking a way upward until his head rose above the level of the bulwarks where the low waist joined the towering galleries of the stern, galleries two storeys deep, their dull length pitted in places with patches of paler grey by the square recesses of the ancient ports. For a moment he stood, staring inwards, then turned, his face aglow with excitement, and fell to cutting the last few steps in the ascent. With the grey line of the bulwarks fore-shortened below his knee, as we watched in silence, he straightened himself, stretching a hand downwards.

"Come, Captain Joan, you must be the first aboard."

CHAPTER XXV

THE GALLEON

At the time we were too full of many blent emotions for speculation, but afterwards we often asked ourselves how the ancient decks came to be so clean swept. Snow there was none and little ice, that little being chiefly in the angles between the thick bulwarks and the deck.

Later, we pieced out a theory that must serve for want of a better. The ice cliff had faced due north. Year by year the short, fierce, southern summer freed the decks of the winter's snow-fall, freed, at times, the bulk of its outer ice, but never freed the hull from the grip which had caught and held it since the day it drove south in that age-old storm. And now, as it drifted north, some breath of spring had played its part, melting the snow as before. Right or wrong, we could find no better explanation.

Nor were the decks swept clean of snow alone. Except the combing of a hatchway and the stump of the main mast, splintered no longer but fretted to a pulpy smoothness by the ice, nothing broke the level between poop and forecastle. The planks were sound underfoot, but soft and spongy through long soaking and the fierce biting of the frost. The outer bulwarks were also sound, but the starboard, which lay along the ice, were stove in spite of their two-foot thickness. Without doubt the hull was also stove;

the hold must have filled instantly on that far off day of disaster, but the grip of ice held, as the tropic rocks held the stern of John Sharland's ship. Nowhere was there visible sign of decay, but every angle had been rounded by slow friction, every projection worn smooth.

In the middle of the poop wall was a closed door, its jambs and lintel scoured so level with the pulpy wood on either side that only the difference in graining betrayed it. Swinging his axe, my lord attacked a panel vigorously, but no chips flew, and every blow fell dull and heavy, almost like the hacking of flesh, nor was there any hollow reverberation. With only room for one to work progress was slow, and the rest of us stood idly by, waiting. Through some superstitious dread I did not understand, the three sailors had refused to follow us on board.

With both panels cracked to the bottom, and the middle piece cut across at the top ready to be driven in at a stroke, my lord turned to me.

"Keep back for the present, Joan, you and Hal; we don't know what is behind."

"What can there be, after all these years?"

"That is just it, we don't know," and lifting his axe again, he drove in the door.

For Hal's sake I would have held back, but, boy like, he had wandered off, tired of waiting, and was clambering up to the poop deck by way of the ice on the inner side. Knowing how sure of foot he was I let him be, and followed the others.

It was very grey beyond the doorway, but no darker than the cuddy of the *Regina* with the dead light closed, and with a moment's pause my sight cleared. Before me stretched a passage, much like that separating Lord Dunquester from Captain Scotton on the *Regina*, but broader and longer, for

two doorways stood on either side instead of their single berths. Of these, one was open and three closed. The open—its door swung inwards—was nearest on the right, a cavern of pitchy blackness, and I passed it by as the others had done. The air smelt damp and stale, heavy with the odour of mouldering wood where water has soaked and soaked, and grown foul in the soaking with no current of air to sweeten it.

Dave and the rest were in the passage before me, grey and ghostly in the gloom, all the greyer for a dim blur of daylight far ahead, too dim to shape their outline, yet enough to give their shadows bulk. Because of the ghostliness I pressed on. Then I heard my lord say with sudden, sharp insistence, "Go back, Catlett; don't let her come here," and Dave's voice answered, "My God! my God!" very low and tense. Then he turned, and we met face to face in the darkness almost where the passage ended.

"Go back, Joan," he said, his hands on my shoulders.

But it was too late. "I've seen already; and what harm can the poor souls do?"

Father Macdonald's phrase stuck Poor souls they surely were, or had been, for all that was left now was the grey-white bones of the poor bodies. Of these I give no close description. There are enough sorrowful and ugly sights in the world without adding another picture to haunt the memory. But there were three in all; two in corners on the left, and one lying half across the flat of the table as a man lies who sleeps upon his arms for utter weariness, and I don't doubt but this poor soul had been utterly weary waiting for the end to come in the silence, the bitter cold, and the darkness.

Dave's hands dropped from my shoulders.

"She's as brave as a man," he said, and I caught a note of pride in the words.

"That is no great boast," answered my lord. Then, as if to prove it, his voice rose sharply, "My God, what's that?"

I saw Dave stiffen, and I know my own skin crept at the slow, rasping shuffle of hesitating feet overhead, but next instant I drew a deep breath.

"It is Hal. I left him climbing to the poop."

"Hal?" There was still a thinness in my lord's voice. "For a moment I thought the dead had come alive!"

Immediately above our heads was the floor of the upper gallery and Hal was on deck, so that the sound was muffled. Slowly, with at times a dull crunching noise as of ice bruised under foot, the shuffling steps crept aft. The poop, I gathered, was not swept as clear as the main deck. Then the sounds changed. There was a rattle like falling pebbles where the blurred light showed in the darkness of the passage beyond the cabin, a scramble that shot down an avalanche of broken ice as the blur darkened, the nearer echo of careful feet and silence; Hal was exploring.

I have always confessed to being easily made coward, but Hal's indifference to the terrors of the unknown shamed me. Drawing my arm through Dave's I took courage. Nor was it likely that Hal would meet sights ugly and unseemly for a boy to face. To make guesses at truth is always easy and I was already building up a story in my mind. God knows how many died in the bitter cold and darkness, but these three were surely the last left alive. Father Macdonald confirmed the thought.

"Poor souls!" he said with an infinite pity, draw-

ing me aside as he spoke so that the light through the hacked-out door might break up the gloom. "God knows how long the bitter fight lasted, but it ended here. It was the cold killed them, I think. See how every opening is barricaded to shut it out—the door, the ports, even the stairs there aft to the upper gallery and the poop with folds of sail cloth. Afterwards, when the ice had ground away the scuttle, letting in the snow and rain, the canvas collapsed. The matted rottenness is hanging there still. But they were dead long before that and they were the last. The others? The Lord of the Great Assize alone knows which of earth's mighty waters has them in keeping. These came here for warmth."

"Next the ice? No! You are wrong there, Macdonald."

"Next the ice," he persisted. "Which was the warmer, no! there was no warmer! which was the less bitter cold, the ice or the exposed outer side with seventy degrees of Antarctic frost soaking through the wood as water soaks a loaf-crust? There was warmth nowhere, comfort nowhere, but here, by the ice, there was leave to live a little longer. And that is what nature struggles for—just a little longer, another week, another day, an hour even! Then the little became too long for him in the forward corner—see how level he lies. Of the three he was the first to die, and there they left him, his hands on his breast. By that time the outer cold was too bitter, or they were too weak—"

"Oh hush!" I cried. "I can't bear it, I can't, I can't. The poor hopeless, helpless souls!"

He turned to me in swift contrition.

"Mistress Joan, remember brave old Sir Humphrey Gilbert's saying, 'God is as near by sea

as by land.' And I doubt not He was closer to these poor souls in the dark than their despair dreamed."

"Come out into the open air, Joan; this is no place for you," said Dave, his arm tightening on mine with a very comforting and vital significance.

But I had got grip of myself again. "No; it just seemed terrible to stand by and catalogue their miseries."

"This one has tried to do that for us himself." My lord bent forward over the table. "Look away a moment, Joan lass."

What he did I do not know, but when he straightened himself he was holding a mouldered flat greyish-white mass in the light from the broken door. He tried to strip it leaf from leaf, but it fell to the floor in pulpy, rotten fragments.

"Leave it with him, Dunquester," said Father Macdonald. "Let him have his record by him till the end."

"What will that be?"

He had no time to reply. As we talked Hal's feet had been heard moving here and there overhead, but always slowly; as if there was much to be seen or he was not sure of his ground. Now, following a silence, there was a sudden rush and the blurred light where the tattered canvas hung at the end of the passage suffered eclipse.

"Joan! Joan! Are you there? I want you. Come and speak to me."

The fresh, clear voice, full of youth's vigorous insistent self-assertion, was a true alembic of the morbid humours that oppressed me. It said to the dead past: Stand aside, here is the present, and the present must be served.

"Yes, Hal, what is it?"

"No, but, Joan come here. I can't go down. There is no ladder."

"Yes," said Dave, glad of the diversion. "Come, Joan," and, my arm still in his, he led me round the table by the outer side.

The planks felt damp under foot, but not so spongy as the deck; desperately cold though it must have been the frost's power had been less penetrating, held at bay in part by the thick timbers. A little water lay in the channel under the battened port; even the scupper hole had been blocked to shut out the biting air. Right aft, well over the great rake of the stern, was the opening to the upper gallery. The ladder lay flat behind it, utterly decayed, and the hatch like square overhead was three-parts choked by many folds of canvas, mouldered and weather-beaten to a blackened mass. Through the remaining space Hal's eager face looked darkly down.

"I have found out why she is so high in the water."

"Have you, Hal? Why?"

"She was in ballast. Stand from under, below there. That's for you, Joan."

The eclipse lightened, darkened, lightened, then grew grey again as Hal pushed something over the edge, and, stooping as before, laughed a joyous laugh good to hear. The something fell with a heavy, dull thud on the sodden deck at Father Macdonald's feet and lay there without rolling. He picked it up, not without effort, and held it in the dim light.

"Take away your head, Hal, that I may see what it is." Then he drew in his breath sharply, and I heard him say, as if speaking to himself. "Surely it was ordained!" and, "the Winds of God blow even in the silence," but without another outspoken word he handed what he held to my lord.

But this did not please Hal, who was again peeking from above.

"It's Joan's," he cried vexedly, "give it to Joan."

"Yes, Hal," he answered, "Joan shall have it, never fear. Are there many more like it?"

"Of course; don't I tell you it's ballast."

It was then that my lord found his tongue, but only stammeringly. "Macdonald, is it—is it—"

"Hush; yes, there is no doubt at all."

"It's Joan's," cried Hal, still more vexedly. "Why don't you give it to Joan?"

"Of course it is Joan's," answered my lord. "But I am coming up beside you. Help me, Catlett."

What was pushed into my hands was so heavy that it nearly tore a way down through my fingers, and I was still struggling with the surprise of its weight when my lord, aided by both Dave and Father Macdonald, clambered through the hatch to the upper gallery. His passage, encumbered as he was by his cloak, had largely torn down the matted web of rotten canvas, doubling the light, so that I could see Hal's ballast clearly.

It was a flattish metal brick, some five inches long by three broad and two deep; its weight was surprising. But it was neither the size nor heaviness that made me cry out to Dave, it was its colour of dull bronze-brown shot, at places, by greenish-yellow. Father Macdonald answered the question I was too shaken to put in words. Hal and my lord were by this time out of sight.

"'Tis surely ordained," he repeated. "Yes, it is gold, Joan. God knows how much there is of it, and God knows what the end will be. It could not bring the poor souls life, and it may well—" then he checked himself. A shadow had fallen across the

hatch as my lord looked down, a yellow-bronze cake in either hand.

"Scores of them," he said breathlessly, shaking them towards us as he spoke. "Scores—scores—scores."

I hated to see the look on his face, and as its message swept through me I hated yet more the accursed metal bricks that could, even for a moment, change a noble, generous-hearted gentleman into the likeness of Blair or Harte. That it was only for a moment I knew, for I remembered how swiftly the true nature of the man had trampled down the false in the cabin of the *Regina* that first day of the hurricane. His face was suffused, blotched red in in places, his eyes hard and shining even against the overhead light, and there was a horrible dribble of moisture about the corners of his half-opened mouth. Not his true nature, no, thank God, no; but surely in us all there must lurk some vile under-devil that no man dreams of until the unexpected snaps its chain.

"We must consider, Dunquester," began Father Macdonald; but the interruption came swift and fierce.

"Damn consideration. What we have we'll keep."

"I mean," said Macdonald, with great quietness and restraint, "we can do nothing to-day; at least not at present. Scotton must be consulted—arranged with; whatever Mistress Joan thinks right—"

Again he was interrupted. "Mistress Joan? What the devil—" Then he paused. A shiver ran through him and he drew a deep, shuddering breath as if to fill his lungs was a pain. "I beg your pardon, Joan," he went on quietly. "Yes, Macdonald, you are quite right; we must consider and

Joan must arrange what is right with Scotton. But we must bring Scotton full proof. Put these in your pockets, Dave; and you, Macdonald, wait a moment." He dropped down the two metal cakes as he spoke, and turned away to reappear with two more in his hands but of unequal sizes. These also he dropped through the hatch. "There is one for your other pocket, Macdonald, and one smaller, for you to carry under your cloak, Joan." Perhaps he read hesitation and dislike in my face; it seemed so like robbing the helpless dead who had, in a measure, died for its sake, for he nodded and smiled down the opening and went on in his old Whitcroft way, Dunquester of Dunquester and master of both The Scaur and Three Oaks. "Take it without scruple, Joan lass. The taking can do no soul harm and may do many good. It's nature's law that the dead hand must give way to the living. Now get back to God's clean air, you three; Hal and I will go by way of the poop."

CHAPTER XXVI

TILL THE SEA GIVES UP ITS DEAD

AND clean, sweet air of God's own giving it tasted as we stood, we three, in the waist of the ancient ship waiting for my lord and Hal. A change had come, one of these swift transitions which at times seem, even in early spring, to breathe the breath of summer. The grey of the sky was thinner, stained to a dusky yellow round the sun, and but for the sheer ice towering so high above us there would have been a sense of genial warmth. And, compared with the cold as we had hugged the ice cliff an hour before, there was a warmth. Moisture glistened dully on the face of the berg, and from the heart of the fissure, as it curved aft of the galleon, tinkled the music of a tiny fall. A swift thaw had set in.

My lord and Hal were slow in coming, but brought the explanation of their tardiness with them. Hal's small cloak, a miniature of the heavy garments worn by his elders, was looped up in a pouch at the one side, nor, from the drag of the cloth was it hard to guess what the pouch held. At sight of it, and of the bundle my lord carried in his own cloak with an attempt at careful concealment, Dave's face darkened. Since Hal's discovery he had not spoken a word, and it was with no good will he had burdened the great flapped pockets of his coat.

Swinging Hal over the raw edge of the poop into

Dave's arms my lord set himself to clamber down the face of the berg, easing his burden before him or dragging it after him as the conditions suited. What was in it we could guess; but he had copied Captain Scotton's simple subterfuge, and from the end the rusted handles of some half-dozen ancient swords projected, together with the haft of the axe. It was slow and troublesome work, dangerous at times, but wreckage driven into the flat of the ice helped him, and at length he dropped to the deck, leaving the bundle on an upper ledge. Its weight fairly staggered him as he drew it after him, but he braced himself and looked round at me with a laugh.

"Macdonald was right, Joan," he said briskly. "'Tis a Wind of God, and yet there's Catlett looking glum! To-morrow—no! let to-morrow be! Thank God! we only live one day at a time."

I think he was partly talking for talking's sake, as men will when their nerve is shaken. But I understood what he meant by the inconsequence: it was that the vile under devil was curbed again and under guard, not to break out to-morrow or any other day. Surely a man must be very clean souled in the main who can fight such a fight and rest on his victory in so short a time?

"That is very well," said Dave sourly, "but think if Blair had come."

"Hell would be loose to-night; but what does not happen is also a Wind of God. As it is it's our secret, and to-morrow Scotton will take Master Blair in hand."

We paused a moment, forming our plan for returning to the boat. Dave would go first, with a hand stretched out behind to steady me who must follow, then Father Macdonald, next Hal. Hal, my

lord explained, quite understood that he was to say nothing of the ballast; Hal was quite a South Adventurer, and knew when to speak and when to hold his tongue. Whereat Hal reddened to the eyes and would have hugged my lord but that his dignity as a South Adventurer and a cumberous metal brick pouched in his cloak both forbade it. Hal, then, would follow Father Macdonald and my lord end the procession, nursing his folded cloak much as one might a baby, though it is to be feared there are many babies valued less highly.

But for that helping hand of Dave's the descent must have beaten me, cumbered as I was with the ingot under my cloak. In every angle of the backward sloping steps water had already gathered, soddening the crispness of the compacted snow to a slipperiness as smooth as ice itself, but easing one foot before the other as a child does, and confident in Dave's strength, I crept safely down. Nor was it just the strength that helped me; it was the comfort of Dave's touch whispering at every step, "It will be all right, Joan," in his calm, undoubting way. My lord would have been as strong, or stronger, but I could never have crept down without a fear as I did leaning on Dave.

Hoggett, looking woefully cold and pinched in spite of the milder air, handed me to the stern. I could see that all three eyed us curiously, especially my lord nursing the long bundle with the peeping hilts, his shoulders braced back, his breath short, his face flushed with exertion and testing his foothold cautiously at every step; but being Whitcroft men and more given to thought than speech they kept their curiosity in check.

For reasons of his own my lord made a change in the manning of the boat, shifting places with Dave

whom he sent to the bow, and taking the stroke oar himself with his bundle at his feet between us.

This time there was less work for those in the bows. Not, of course, that the ice had materially melted, but it had drawn more together in lines, as if some giant reaper had walked the sea and laid the floes in swathes. Between these we passed, not rapidly, but without difficulty. Nor was the sea as dead as it had been. Though there was no wind the whole surface heaved uneasily, so that the grating grind of floe on floe never ceased, while the crackling thunder as the larger bergs split their fragments into the sea rang louder and more frequent than before. Dave, who had been talking to Hoggett, looked across his shoulder.

"There is wind coming: that's what this heave of the sea means; Hoggett says so."

"Wind?" said my lord, hanging on his stroke. "But to-morrow—" Then he paused, remembering that it was neither safe nor wise to speak of to-morrow with forecastle ears open to listen, and through the silence of the pause there broke a louder crackle of ice, the warning plunge of the loosened fragments following like an echo. "My God!" I heard him breathe, "look, Macdonald look!"

At the change in his face, rather than warned by the whisper, I turned. From under the stern of the galleon and behind it a huge block of the ice cliff had split, carrying with it the outer skin and hardened snow, and the hulk lay bare almost to the forecastle. The courses of the galleries with their blinded ports were plainly to be seen. On the poop deck, angled back like a fall of screes from the unguarded outer edge up to the face of the berg far above the starboard quarter, lay a sloping pile of icy rocks, great boulders of greenish grey changing to

emerald as the light shot through them. Near by, still rolling heavily from the impact, swam the fallen mass, the sea tossing and seething round it in waves that surged their swollen mounds high up the flat of the parent berg, breaking against the ancient hulk itself with a force that drove the spray in clouds to the blinded ports. And over all the sea birds sailed the air in wide, swooping circles, shrilling their sharp cries.

Then, as we watched, awed and silent, I heard my lord's voice a second time, but so hoarse and unnatural, was it that I knew it only by its nearness.

"Look, Macdonald, look! In God's name, man, is it the end—is it the end?"

And Father Macdonald answered strangely as I thought at the time: later I understood his meaning better.

"God be thanked for His mercies! It is the end."

Their eyes were keener than mine or their comprehension quicker. It was only when silence fell again that I understood. And, indeed, motion at the first was very slow. But the frozen shroud shivered from the towering bows, leaving the huge nakedness gaunt and ugly; and then at last I saw what they had seen—the sliding backward of the great hulk. Years ago she had so slidden from the slips, years and years ago: before Drake's time, before Armada days, before *Elizabeth* was *Regina*, before—But there could be no doubt now that she was moving. The ice rasped and roared with the grinding of the friction; a steaming vapour like fine dust or smoke, rose about her in a cloud: from the further cliff a hundred flinty boulders shot glimmering into the air, curved and splashed heavily.

"Look! Macdonald, look!" said my lord again. "My God! Macdonald, look!"

He did not seem to be able to get away from the set form of words: but that I knew he could not be a coward, I would have said from his voice that he was frightened to his depths.

Then she plunged and I think a gasp ran through us all. I know I found my nails biting my palms and my teeth my lip, though at the time I felt neither. It was a sluggish plunge, not swiftly light of heart as must have been that plunge before Drake's days when the fresh-hewn oak took the water for the first time. Age burdens all with the sorrows of the world, sorrows of our own making at times, but none the less heavy for that—more, rather. And was she not burdened? If these three could speak—he, laid level in the forward corner, these others who were too weak to give him burial, or found the air too biting cold: above all, he who lay across the recorded miseries which had perished to the world even as he had perished, what would they not answer? Truly she carried the burden age so often carries, desolation and loneliness, haunting memories of failure and broken hopes: under such a burden she did well to plunge sluggishly. But the jar shook down the upper face of the cliff and a thundering crash of boulders roared out a salvo, as no doubt the guns had roared at that other baptism before Drake's time. Then it had been a salvo of welcome and the triumph of man over the powers of nature, now it was Time's revenge and the powers of nature answered in a farewell to the dead whose triumph had ended in disaster and the darkness of despair.

Slowly, sluggishly, she shot out her own length, or a little more, from her berth of a hundred years and stayed, brought up in part by the floating ice: then, driven by the pressure under the raking stern, she eased forward into clear water. The impact had

shaken off much of the rubbish piled upon the deck, but enough remained heaped to the starboard side to increase the list caused by the rush of waters through the stoven timbers.

Slowly, sluggishly, she spun: now the huge careened wall of the larboard side coated thick with strange sea growths, now the rounded, towering bows, stove like the bulwarks, now the slant of the shorn deck turned towards us, and with every shift the hull gloomed black, or shone a silver grey as the light struck on the frost-bitten planking. The leak showed raw as the cleft of a knife-back crushed through an egg shell.

Slowly, slugggishly, the stern sank and the list sharpened, tilting the piled rubbish with a hollow rattle across the deck into the sea. But the forced jettison gave no relief. How could it relieve with the sea racing between the cracked ribs into the water-logged hull, already filled level with the wash? Every tilted inch sank the wound deeper, hastening the end.

How long that end was in coming I do not know. Moments of crisis are like a dream, the watcher and the sleeper are alike lost to time. But I know none spoke or stirred. I thought that even the grind of floe on floe ceased; that nature, too, held her breath waiting for the end. Of course, that was my own concentration; all my senses were strained to the one purpose, that sight and hearing should lose nothing. And because of that concentration the end seemed to come rapidly. Perceptibly, increasingly, the monstrous crushed bow rose until the huge rake of the forecastle stood clear, and the after scuttle sank below the surface then she settled down, sluggishly and in silence. At the last she rolled heavily, through some opening in the forecastle the

pent air rushed out with a moan, the bow shot upright and she sank as a stone sinks; there was a seething swirl, the rush of small waves to clash and break in a common centre, a little spouting fountain of up-pouring bubbles. The question I had asked Father Macdonald was answered, this was the end.

Perhaps its memory drew me; for the first time I looked back along the line of watching faces. His eyes were fixed like the rest, but his lips were moving and his finger-tips wandered vaguely across his breast. There was no doubt that he prayed. The fascination of the final tragedy had so possessed me, that for a moment I wondered why. In times of stress, prayer is often no more than a hysterical emotion, an arrow-point unfeathered by faith and desire to give it flight; that was unlike Father Macdonald. Then I remembered the poor souls, and a great rush of pity drove the tears to my eyes. Spain had been no friend of ours in those old days, Spain was no friend of ours in these, but there is no enmity in the dead. May their bones rest in peace where their Maker has laid them, and may His peace be theirs on that Great Day when the sea shall give up the dead it guards until the awakening trump.

My lord was the first to speak.

"To-morrow!" he said suddenly with a hard laugh, "who counts on to-morrow? There is never a to-morrow until possessed and then it is to-day." But just as suddenly he sobered and his eyes met mine with a smile. "You were right, Macdonald, God be thanked for His mercies. Give way all."

Nor did he long keep silence. Right up to the ladder of the *Regina* he maintained a fire of quips and comments showered upon all sides, at Dave or Hoggett in a gibing censure if the boat so much as grazed an ice-floe, at Father Macdonald for

breathing heavily as he rowed, he had lived too much in the sun of late and was out of condition, at Hal for not working his passage like every other South Adventurer, at whosoever's oar slipped splashing from a cake of floating ice, and there were many, but never at me who sat wondering why such a change to jesting and the trivial had come. But as the grim set of the forecastle faces behind him relaxed their dour gravity I understood. He was shifting the current of their thoughts, dissociating it from the foundered ship and the bundle lying at his feet, to the petty errors and lapses in others which human nature loves so dearly to pillory. And shifted it was. Alongside the *Regina* grins still lurked on their faces while they busied themselves laying the oars aboard and with the boat generally, giving no heed to us as we climbed the ladder with most of the crew watching and Captain Scotton waiting us on the deck.

"You saw her go down?" said my lord gaily, as if the excitement of it all was still stirring his blood. Then he patted the bundle nursed in his arms, speaking loud enough for those standing back to hear, "I would not have missed the nearer sight for a thousand pounds. But we salved some old metal from her first, as you can see. It is Mistress Sharland's adventure, and hers to dispose of, but I think I shall ask for this iron-basket hilt for myself as a remembrance."

CHAPTER XXVII

DAVE AND I ARE AT ODDS

HOGGETT'S sea lore had not deceived him, wind came. As I lay sleepless in the dead hours of the night, my troubled thought seeking some place of rest but finding none, Oscroft's silver whistle sounded. At such an hour and through such a quietness its piping had but one meaning. The stamping of sea-boots hurrying along the deck and sing-song of the sailors as they handled the ropes were confirmation, wind had come and the *Regina* was making sail. Then followed a gentle, soothing sway of the stern and the music of the water as it lapped and sucked, clucked and gurgled under the quarter, not only had wind come, but the *Regina* was under weigh.

After all these weeks at sea I suppose I should have guessed what tack we were on, and so have known by our labouring whether we were being driven yet deeper into the ice or were, at long last, working northwards and homewards. But that which had driven sleep away had also numbed calculation, and I neither knew nor cared, what did it matter since Dave and I were at odds?

It came about this way.

By my lord's request we were all gathered in his cabin, which lay across the passage from Captain Scotton's, all except Hal that is, Hal was in bed.

The berth was shaped and furnished much like the captain's, with the bunk in the inner corner furthest from the door. The window looking out to the main deck had been latticed dark so that no spying was possible, and the flap-table underneath it lowered to give space. The rusted swords, five or six of them, stood propped in an angle, but spread on the bed coverings lay the true spoils of the galleon.

The array staggered me, and at my elbow I heard Dave whisper that under his breath which he rarely said openly and never thought willingly, for there were eleven of the larger ingots as well as the two smaller which Hal and I had carried. There was a sparkle of mischief in my lord's eyes when they met mine as I cried out,

"How could you carry such a weight."

He laughed outright at that, "Do I look such a weakling? But for the need of concealment I could have carried twice as much. What is the value of Captain Joan's fortune, Macdonald?"

"Not mine," said I, and drew back.

"No one else's," he retorted. "You found the galleon, Hal the treasure. It's all for Joan," said he. "And do you think I risked a broken neck down these steps for—" He paused, all laughter gone from his eyes; then added brusquely, a hard contempt in his voice, "for Blair or myself? No. For John Sharland's daughter and no one else."

There was a silence. Dave, whom I lightly brushed, stirred uneasily. As to my lord, having seen his face as he looked down through the hatch from the upper gallery, I think I understood his meaning. He had fouled himself then in his own eyes, the memory rankled, and this would cleanse at least the grossness of the fleeting purpose. There was once a man who, when bidden work in the vineyard said, I will not,

but afterwards repented and went. He might never forgive himself, but his Father forgave him. And because of this cleansing my lord would take any refusal very hardly; it would be a rejection of his amends, and what wound can bite friendship deeper or rankle longer unhealed? The continued silence was a tacit acceptance.

"How much do you reckon, Macdonald?"

Father Macdonald appeared to expect the question. Very probably this was a little comedy arranged beforehand for Dave's benefit and mine. It failed lamentably with Dave.

"These eleven are all heavy alike." Father Macdonald lifted one of the larger ingots from the bed, weighing it up and down in his hands as he spoke. But my lord's impatience broke in on his deliberation.

"It's not guess-work, Joan. I don't understand the method, but Macdonald reckons the value by measurements. How much, Macdonald?

"Fifteen thousand guineas," said Father Macdonald briefly, and his eyes were on Dave, not on me, as he spoke. And Dave, a hand pressed heavily on my shoulder, was whispering, "Refuse. Say no, Joan, say no."

But my lord broke in again: this time there was a strong gravity, almost a sternness in his voice.

"Give something to the men who were faithful and one of these smaller ingots to Scotton; without a doubt the rest is yours, Joan. There at the wreck—John Sharland's wreck—you were right; no such gain is worth murder. And murder there surely would be if we went back; not our murder, perhaps, but blood at the finding as there had been at the keeping and the hiding. So the Wind of God drove us South, God knows where, but since He knows I

take it that is enough. In the dark places of life it is His knowledge that matters, not ours. Am I right so far, Catlett?"

But Dave answered nothing. His face was set and dour as I have seen it two or three times in my life. I have come to know the look. It means an end to reason. And after all, it was not my lord's reasoning he quarrelled with but what lay on the bed-clothing, nor did I understand all that meant to him. For myself, I said in my heart that so far my lord was right. As no one answered he picked up his thread where he had dropped it, only now he spoke more directly to Dave.

"Was it by chance that the wind drove us South, where no man looked to be when he sailed from Whitcroft, and left us adrift in the ice? Was it by chance that of us all Joan picked out to-day the grey patch on the slanted face of the berg? Was it by chance that you over-rode Scotton's refusal to lower a boat? Was it chance that Hal climbed where he did, stumbled on what he did, and knowing nothing of any value insisted that it was all for Joan? Was it chance that a wind of the devil swept me, to my shame? No, Joan, let us face the whole truth: I was Blair for that moment, Blair in intent, Blair in unscrupulous desire, I, who never knew it was in me; not murder perhaps, but that for which murder is done." From Dave his glance had swept to me as I attempted a protest, now it passed back to Dave, and he laid a hand on the ingots beside him. "Yet see what came out of it. To prove to Joan that I had the devil throttled under I loaded myself with these. Joan again, always Joan! But for Joan I would have waited for the morrow that can never come. Is that all chance? No! but John Sharland's Wind of God from first to last."

From Dave he turned again to me and the strong vigour of his voice softened. But Dave's grasp upon my shoulder grew closer and I heard him grit his teeth.

"Joan, dear lass, it is not what we had imagined for you; it will not restore the station he who called himself John Sharland chose, as I believe, to step aside from, no money could do that, but its thousand guineas a year—"

"Damnation!" cried Dave and spun round, pushing me from him half unconsciously, for I think he had forgotten that his hand was on my shoulder. Then without another word he flung out of the cabin, leaving us to our confusion. It was Father Macdonald who broke the uneasy silence.

"Mistress Joan, I am bound to say that Dunquester is right, utterly and entirely right."

I thought so too, and acquiesced. But perhaps there are times when it is better and wiser to be wrong with those you love than right with those you do not; for Dave and I were at odds, and so I cared little whether the *Regina* drove deeper into the southern ice or bore northward and homeward.

And yet I was angry with Dave. No, not angry, sore of heart would be more the truth. I don't think it is possible to be passionately angry with those one loves passionately. If the day of passionate anger comes the day of passionate love has gone, though at times what seems passionate anger is only love in another guise. And my heart, as I lay in the darkness listening to the plash and gurgle of the water, was bitterly sore. Why were we at odds, Dave and I? If he had grown jealous of my lord who called me "Joan, dear lass," at times: who put a hand on my shoulder while he pointed out this or that of interest in sky or sea, or laid an arm about me for

safety in the violence of the *Regina's* heel or roll, all as to a sister or a daughter, it would have been human, though foolish. But to grow jealous of a row of cold ingots which were his as much as mine—surely that was madness itself?

And was my lord not right, and in his way was Ezra Plowden not right? Was it not ordained that these ingots should be there? And, even for the sake of being comfortably wrong with love, how could I say to my lord, I refuse your remorse and fling back your reparation, let the Blair in you keep what its greed saved from the wreck? I, who owed it to his generosity that the South Adventure with its fulfilment of my promise to my father had been possible at all: I could not, and surely Dave must know it. It was he simplest logic of gratitude. But then, love and .ogic have little in common beyond their two first letters.

When I went on deck before eight o'clock it was to find the *Regina* close-hauled on the larboard tack, but with every stitch of canvas set and making six or seven knots under a steady southerly breeze. The air was cold, but crisp and wholesome, the sea smooth, and from time to time the sun blinked between broken clouds. South and east the tops of bergs showed faintly against the grey-white of the horizon, but there was no loose ice.

With such a full-hearted breeze from the south and a clear sea our course surprised me. I would have supposed we should be heading with square-yards northwards, and said as much to Mr. Cuthbert who was on watch, with Carleton at the wheel.

"We are tired of salt water," he answered, with a laugh; "so it's us for the nearest land! The truth is our casks need filling, and the captain thinks—and he is right—that the gear will be none the worse

for our overhauling before we make a leg for home. She has had a bucketting, you know, has the old hooker."

"The nearest land, where is that?" I asked.

He laughed again and glanced up at the sun, showing through a rift in the clouds.

"Ask me that after twelve o'clock and perhaps I'll answer you. But this tack is always on our way to it for, of course, the nearest land lies west, though just whereabouts is not so sure. The Captain's present idea is to try for the Sibble Wards."

That baffled me. My father had talked of the world over-seas many a time, though always in an impersonal way; as if he had read of this, had heard tell of that, never as if he had seen what he spoke of. Yet I never had a doubt that with him the impersonal was personal, so acute was the observation, so clear-cut and graphic the details of the picture; but never once had he spoken of the Sibble Wards. The question in my mind tripped from my tongue.

"The Sibble Wards? What are the Sibble Wards and where are they?"

"They?" Mr. Cuthbert eyed me whimsically. "I'll tell you the truth, Mistress Sharland, though I'll tell no one else, and you won't either. You took what came at Los Reyos blithely and never whined over the ice, though some of these fo'cksle curs did. I don't know if the Sibble Wards are 'they' or not, and I don't think the Captain knows either for certain. As to the where—there is a blotch on the chart three hundred miles east of Magelanic Land, and it is called the Sibble Wards."

"Are they islands?"

He nodded. "But don't ask me anything about them, Mistress Sharland, for I can't answer you. Until we get the sun we don't even know if we are

heading right." He grew confidential, perhaps because I had not whined at the ice. "But I hope we are; land we must find and the Sibble Wards would be better than God knows what scurvy devils on the mainland coast west of them."

I thought a moment, then said, "Why not ask Ezra Plowden? He has been hereabouts before."

"Plowden?" he looked doubtful. "I don't know. I would not like to ask that swine anything. He would blurt it out to Blair. Besides, who could believe him?"

"I could," I answered. "This time it is his interest to tell the truth." That was not a reason of high moral magnificence perhaps, but nobler souls than Ezra Plowden have obeyed its influence. Then I added, having the upper hatch of the galleon in my mind. "I do not believe Plowden is all bad. Did you never come short of the best that is in you, Mr. Cuthbert, and repent it afterwards?"

His eyes twinkled. "One confessional priest aboard is quite enough, Miss Sharland. You are not Father Macdonald—Thank God!" he added. "As to Plowden, I'll talk to him quietly, and tell him that you have a better opinion of him than I have—though that is not saying much!"

That day, the first time for almost a month, the sun shone at noon, but not clearly, and of the three reckonings, Captain Scotton's, Mr. Cuthbert's, and Mr. Stenson's, no two agreed. But the approximation was close enough for guidance, and the *Regina* held her course of west with a point of north; the distance, they calculated, was about six hundred miles or four days' sailing, if the breeze held.

And hold it did But the odds between Dave and myself held also, poisoning life's wholesome pleasure in the sun and sweet, brisk air, for spring was abroad

on the face of the waters. There was no open quarrel, a sorrow was between us rather than an anger, but a sorrow that cannot be shared is the heaviest burden of life next to death. Nor was there a remedy. For love's sake I would gladly have given up all that lay between us had the sacrifice been my own; nor, for love's sake, would it have been a sacrifice. But the sacrifice was a friend's restored honour and respect, and so the days passed in silence on what lay nearest to us both.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SIBBLE WARDS

BUT though the wind held it was the forenoon of the fifth day before the *Regina*, under shortened sail, drew close to what Mr. Cuthbert had called a blotch upon the chart. Once our position was ascertained —and each day's sun verified it—Captain Scotton made no secret of his objective, but no one on board had been able to give any idea what to expect. Plowden, when Mr. Cuthbert sounded him, was honestly ignorant. In the circumstances I counted that to him for righteousness—to have lied vaguely would have been easy for such an expert as Ezra Plowden. Father Macdonald, to whom I turned in a difficulty as naturally as one takes down a book of universal knowledge from a shelf, not only admitted an ignorance as full as Plowden's, but privately doubted the very existence of the Sibble Wards.

"Cartographers," said he, "are as dogmatic as Churchmen—and as speculative!"

But on the early morning of the fifth day a cloud, as it seemed to me, rose in the western horizon and Blair, who was aloft, sang out "Land ho!" from the foremast. It was his watch below, but through the past month Blair's zeal had known no limits. Who—ever complained,—and with the galley fires washed out half the days, and the bitter, bitter cold soaking the forecastle where clothing was insufficient, there

was good cause for grumbling,—it was never Michael Blair. Nor could there be any doubt but that his unfailing good temper and cheeriness, coupled with a willing service, had helped discipline through a time of anxious stress: he was always first aloft and last to the deck, and no man leaped so readily to Oscroft's whistle. If bygones were to be bygones Michael Blair made the way to forgiveness easy. It is probable that when he volunteered for the boat he was testing his success.

That was my opinion when we talked it over in the cuddy. Captain Scotton's little eyes gleamed viciously as he listened.

"Blair? He'll never change! Whitewash a nigger an' what differ does it make inside! None at all!"

"Then you don't trust Blair?" said Father Macdonald.

Scotton smiled grimly. "I trust him as far as 10 degrees South on the return voyage or thereabouts! 'Cause why? It's his interest to behave an' up to that Blair'll be all sugar an' butter—then I'll show him Tom Scotton! Oh! I know!" He raised a hand as my lord shifted uneasily at the truculent threat in the hard voice. "It's agreed Blair is to be free from the law. That I'll hold to. I grant we owe him somethin.' We might not have come through what we have without the help of Blair an' Blair's blackguards, an' we'll need all hands for the overhaulin'. No, no law. But you can quiet a scratchin' cat more ways nor with a rope. Leave it to me when the time comes, an' don't you fret, Mistress Sharland, Tom Scotton's not sleepin'."

And, indeed, he was very cautiously wide awake as we crept inshore towards the islands, for islands there were and the "they" was justified. As a man fumbles his way slowly across an unknown room in

the dark so Captain Scotton felt a track for the *Regina* towards the gurnard-headed island lying nearest, a huge, long-drawn outline stretching North and South. No precaution was neglected. The cloths were off her, down to a reefed foresail, Mr. Cuthbert aloft, conning a passage from the foremast, two leadsmen in the fore chains, one at either side, heaving and calling the result alternatively. That the wind had fallen to soft airs, leaving the sea no more than a gentle roll from the south, favoured us. Over this quiet sea, at a mile or two an hour, the *Regina* dipped and curtseyed, driving broad hissing sheets of foam before her as she heeled to the swell: from time to time Mr. Cuthbert called an order which was passed along to the poop.

But our eyes, mine at least, were so fixed on this unknown land, a land which none on board had so much as seen, that little heed was given to the conning of the ship. Here, after all our storms, was a haven of peace, and yet, even after a month's buffetings, a month of daily misery and daily fear, the closer we drew to the shore the colder grew the exultation of my spirit. Peace? Perhaps, but the peace of desolation,—chilly, gloomy desolation unrelieved by any glamour of awe or gift of natural beauty to kindle the eyes.

The main islands were two, but so imposed, the East against the West, as at first sight to appear but one, like the ridges of the Cow and Calf in Dorset, with a few scattered islets along its coast. The nearer of these two was many miles in length, its northern end rising abruptly two thousand feet in a grey-brown misty mass of sterile rocks, though we could not judge the height at that time. This was the gurnard's head, the tail showed scantily above the face of the waters, a dingy waste, void of a single

tree to break the monotony of its forbidding level, nor were the sheltered valleys between the rising hills to the north less squalidly bare. It seemed a land forgotten of the Lord God, as if in His creation He had said, Here no man comes, let not my gifts of beauty waste themselves on emptiness. A forlorn land, a land of windy desolation, and yet a harbour of refuge. Truly the purposes of creation fulfil themselves in many ways.

For our harbour of refuge lay in the outposts of the sterile rocks to the north. Curtseying and bowing in the gentle roll of the swell the *Regina* crept shorewards. From where he stood on the upper top-sail yard, plainly in view, Mr. Cuthbert steered us now with a motion of his hand. Fortunately nature had set out her danger signals in the huge kelp growths that, springing from hidden reefs, buoyed, as it were, a channel of safety with their dark floating patches upon the grey-green of the sea. Between these the leadsmen found no bottom with their sinkers, and when Captain Scotton saw a long, narrow bay open, with a sheltering island lying across its mouth like a break-water, and the rocky coast dropping sheer to the water at either side, he swore aloud in his satisfaction.

Round we swung under a rag of sail, the island on our right, the wind full aft; round again with a larboard helm and the last rag of canvas housed till we had run a hundred yards or so down the inlet, then Captain Scotton motioned with his hand, Oscroft piped shrilly, from the forecastle Mr. Stenson motioned in response, and the cable roared through the hawse holes as the great anchor plunged. Slowly the *Regina* forged ahead, swung bows to the sea with the set of the flood tide, and stayed.

We lay within the mouth of a rock-bound bay

three-quarters of a mile deep and one-third as much wide, but closing in at the lower end to a pebbly beach. Stunted shrubs, springing from patches of coarse grass, clung to the fissures or lined the beds of intersecting clefts at either side; lichens, orange-brown and grey, stained the face of the rocks; there were no trees. Across the beach a stream poured fresh water for the filling of our casks; beyond it a valley ran back, twisted to the right, and was lost in a fold of the hills. Here again were the same stunted shrubs, the same strong, coarse grass, the same treelessness, the same forlorn, repellent desolation of loneliness—utter loneliness; nowhere was there any sign of a living creature.

Nevertheless, my lord turned to Captain Scotton with a question, only to have it misunderstood.

"Is it safe?"

"Safe as Plymouth Hoe! What sea could touch her?"

"But I mean from attack."

"That?" They were facing landward, and Scotton searched both beach and valley before answering. "I saw no smoke as we came in, I see no boats—yes, safe enough, but we'll take no risks. Pipe all hands aft, Oscroft."

It was the third time I had seen the crew gathered below the break of the poop, and each time with a difference. The almost hourly fight of the past month had left its mark upon them. If they had seemed an ill-conditioned, hard-bitten lot in the sunshine off Los Reyos, a subtle but undoubted worstening showed itself under the grey skies of this forlorn land. It was not that they were thinner, gaunter, more pinched—men may be that and yet not show loss in caste. How to describe the change baffled me. Then it had been as if the strong light showed

up an ugliness of body, while now it was the spirit that repelled. It was the difference between a clean wound and one that festers.

"My lads!" Never had I heard Scotton's voice less harshly dominant. "You've had a hard time of it through no one's fault, an' there's not a man of you all but has done his duty like a man. I'll say frankly, the best the ship can give you is due to you. From the look of things a day ashore would be no great catch, so we'll have our jollity aboard. The galley and the cuddy'll give ye the best they've got. Fetch out your fo'c'sle fiddle for a dance, an' there'll be a tub of punch to lighten your heels an' help you to forget the month that's past." He paused a moment, as if weighing a thought, but only for a moment, nor was there change in the suavity of his voice. "Blair, I put you in charge of it. See that every man gets his share, but that there's no gutter-swiping, d'ye hear?"

His pause was longer this time, and Blair's "Aye, aye, and thank'ee, sir," was drowned in a rumble of hoarse cheers. Scotton lifted his hand for silence.

"That's one side of it—here's another. No man here knows these parts. You needn't keep full watch to-night—Mr. Cuthbert will settle about that—but let there be a bright look-out, whoever's on duty. I'm not afraid of trouble, but we'll load the fo'c'sle gun an' one of the swivels aft here, an' the orders are to fire at whatever is suspicious. That's all, lads. Make the most of your spree, you've deserved it, an' to-morrow we'll begin refitting for the run home."

They certainly cheered him with a will as he stepped back from the rail, answering them by a flourish of his arm; but my mind was troubled by more than one uncertainty. Nor in that was I alone.

"What do you make of that?" said Father Macdonald, nodding his head where Blair passed out of sight beyond the galley deck-house, his arms flung familiarly across the shoulders of the men he walked between. "Both were in Mr. Cuthbert's boat at John Sharland's wreck."

Captain Scotton chuckled. "That? That's plain enough. Blair, like the liar he is, is tryin' to say to us up here, 'See how I've changed my friends'—when he hasn't. As to Tollitt and Sparrow—won't Blair serve out the punch to-night, an' why wouldn't they be thick with him?"

That brought in my lord with a question that was quivering on my own tongue. From the way he spoke it was plain to see he was grievously offended; indeed, it was less a question than a censure.

"I wonder greatly, Captain Scotton, that you could single out such a scoundrel as Blair for trust in any form."

Round swung Scotton, the chuckle still in his eyes.

"Aye! that's the way it would strike a gentleman who doesn't know sailormen. Now, I'm no gentleman, an' I do know 'em. Blair's ripe for Execution Dock an' yet I trust him. How's that, you say? This way. To let him think bygones are bygones, though that's not all. There is not a man forrard but will get drunk to-night if he can. Who would blame him after all that's come and gone? Not me for one! In their place I'd get drunk too, if I could. That's how I know sailormen—because I'm one o' them. But there's work to be done to-morrow, an' I want no fuzzed heads. Who'll keep them sober? Why, Blair—Blair who wants to be on the smooth side of us."

But I had a question to ask in my turn.

"Captain Scotton, surely you do not truly mean

that if a boat shows near the ship at night it is to be fired on without first enquiring——"

"Aye, Young Madam," he interrupted sharply, "I mean just that. There's no law hereabouts but Abingdon law, an' by God, they'll have it!" Then he stumped away, his beard bristling.

"What does he mean by that?"

Father Macdonald laughed, as much at my discomfiture as my bewilderment.

"Hang first and try afterwards." Then he, too, grew grave. "And Captain Scotton is right, Joan. A boat that creeps in upon the *Regina* in the dark means mischief. But please God there will be no firing of the swivel."

There were many to echo Father Macdonald's prayer in the days near at hand.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE JOLLITY

It was about eight o'clock that night when my lord pressed me to go and see what Captain Scotton had called the jollity. From what he said it little deserved the name. Not even the tub of punch had lightened their heels, while the music that reached us aft seemed born of the sorrows of the sea and the wailings of the wind, so plaintively mournful was it.

Trant and Ezra Plowden were the fiddlers. That surprised me, yet I do not know why it should. Plowden had the large, clear eye which so often goes with the musician; then the true musician, like every great artist, must have the gift of a splendid imagination and there Ezra Plowden showed no lack. Mercadello and Santa Carlos proved the possession!

Very reluctantly I went. I could see no reason why humble folk should have uninvited guests thrust upon them just because they were humble folk and could not resent the intrusion, but my lord promised that we should keep out of sight in the shadows in the background. And so we did, favoured by the blackness of the night. Intensely black it was, the loom of the land seemed no more than an oar's reach off on either side; overhead a grey scud flew low, broken across by the flitting wraiths of pale sea birds.

We paused in the gloom of the bulwarks beyond the ship's waist. The crew were gathered in a circle between the galley deck-house and the forecastle, some seated on coils of rope, some on upturned buckets, others stretched on the deck itself. A few were playing cards by the light of two or three dim lanterns; but the greater number yarned quietly or sat listening to Ezra Plowden's sorrowful fiddle. With his back to the deck-house sat Blair, his tub of office beside him.

Remembering the lean bag he had nursed between his knees the night we left Whitcroft I wondered was the fiddle his own, salved and guarded through all the shifts of his grinding poverty. I thought it must be, it answered his touch so readily. Though it was a wretched instrument, Plowden contrived to find a soul in it. Perhaps he had a soul himself, hidden away somewhere under his lying and roguery, a battered, world-stained soul, even as the violin singing or weeping under his touch, scarred and soiled, had yet the spirit of music, and soul drew soul.

It was strange music, tags of this or that linked together by his own imaginings, or maybe by unrecognized memories. Ezra Plowden had wandered far, and though the rolling stone may not gather moss it cannot but lay by some harvest of its own, be it good or bad. By turns he was gay, by turns grave; now there was the lilt of a song, now a wailing dirge with the sob of tears in it, now the quick patter of a hornpipe to set the feet tapping. Then he slipped into an air I knew well, many a time I had sung it to the harpsichord at The Scaur. My lord recognized it also.

"Sing, Joan," he whispered urgently. "Sing for them, there's a dear lass."

"Should I?" I answered back under my breath doubtfully.

"Yes, the cuddy was to give of its best." His voice deepened, "Please me and sing, if only to show that my sin of the hulk is forgiven."

Neither jesting plea moved me, though perhaps the second was not all a jest; but Ezra Plowden, contrary to his usage, went back upon the air a second time and the repetition drew me. With all my soul I yearned for The Scaur and Whitcroft, and the old peace of our quiet life. So yearning I sang:—

> Cherry ripe! cherry ripe! ripe, I cry,
> Full and fair ones, come and buy!

There had been a discordant jar of the strings as my voice broke in upon the air; but Plowden promptly caught me up, sustaining, strengthening, filling out each note, but never once over-riding the voice.

I make no pretence to skill in music, so it was, I think, the strangeness and the surprise that moved them. Out of the silence of the night, a night black and brooding and dead except for the grey, ghostly birds swooping overhead, my song was born. Sailors are responsive to emotion and that of itself moved them. After the first note all buzz of talk ceased, the changing tap of feet to the changing music stopped abruptly, the cards hung poised in the players' hands as they leaned forward, listening, and at the end a stirless hush fell—just for a moment. Then there was a roar that set my skin prickling, so full-throated and generous it was. While it still rumbled Blair jumped to his feet, waving his cap in the air.

"A cheer for Mistress Sharland, lads," he bellowed for it was nothing short of a bellow. "A

cheer for Mistress Sharland and a fair wind to Los Reyos! Up on your feet, bullies, and give it with a will! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

And they gave it with a will! The deck seemed to tremble under our feet at the hoarse shout that went up, and out of the grey scud the ghosts of dead sailors circled, screaming their alarm.

"Did I not tell you?" whispered my lord, though what had been in his mind I could only guess: he had told me nothing. "We have won them, Joan my lass. If there was doubt before there is none now. Hark to that! Shall I thank them for their thanks, or will you?"

"I cannot," I whispered back. It was true in more senses than one: the quick coming and going of my breath would have beggared speech. Then I added, "But there will be no Los Reyos. It may save mischief hereafter if they understand now."

He looked at me doubtfully in the darkness. They know already. I told them so that day in the ice. Better let it sleep.

"If they know why did Blair say that? If there is any doubt, end it. Tell them plainly. There can be no Los Reyos."

There was no time for debate. He must speak at once if he was to speak at all, and not to speak a word of recognition would be churlish. With a nod to me he went forward a pace or two.

"My lads, Mistress Sharland bids me say that she is proud that her song pleased you. She feels, as we all feel, great sorrow for the many privations you have endured so uncomplainingly and with such true English courage. We cannot sufficiently admire, we can never hope to repay."

"Los Reyos!" sang out a voice the name only, and

a tense silence followed. It was Trant I thought who spoke, but I could not be sure.

"Los Reyos!" my lord's voice hardened. "There will be no return to Los Reyos. Some of you can guess the reasons for yourselves. But bygones are bygones, so let that pass. Another cheer for Mistress Sharland and a quick run home!"

Again it was Blair who led.

"Aye, aye," he called out with great alacrity. "Let bygones be bygones. Heartily now, lads, heartily; Mistress Sharland and a quick run home!"

Once more they responded with a good will. The cheers were still ringing in our ears as we turned towards the poop and ran into Captain Scotton hanging back in the shadow of the deck-house.

"You heard Blair?" There was no mistaking the triumphant challenge in my lord's voice.

"Aye, aye, I heard," answered Scotton tolerantly. "We'll speak each other fair, he and I, till 10, South, or thereabouts: because, d'ye see, we need each other till then. Blair was payin' back the tub of punch. You don't know sailormen an' I do."

But in spite of his grumbling doubts, or perhaps I should say certainties, I would have gone to bed happier that night than I had for weeks only for one thing—Dave and I were still at odds. He was always the good, kind, thoughtful Dave I had known all my life, always watchful, always helpful—but there was a subtle difference. An elder brother, strong, gentle, and quietly affectionate might have been like Dave these days. But I did not want a brother, I wanted Dave—Dave as he had been in the days when I had forbidden the lover, days when the letter killed but the spirit made alive. Then neither word not act had been needed, now I hungered for both. But Dave had grown jealous of the ingots from the hulk,

and that night my little triumph was spoilt because he did not share it with me.

Blair justified Captain Scotton's shrewdness, notwithstanding the tub of punch, every man was fit for duty next morning. And because of the noise and discomfort on board with all hands busy on the refitting my lord and Father Macdonald, with Mr. Eliot and two of a crew, took a boat ashore to judge whether I might land in safety. They returned before dinner, reporting that there was but little life of any kind, and neither trace nor track of natives : so far as they could judge the valley was, and always had been, uninhabited.

After dinner, therefore, we rowed to the beach at the end of the inlet, this time with a full boat's company and two of the water-casks for filling. Dave remained on board. He could lend a hand, he said, and the more help there was the sooner we would be free of the desolation of the Sibble Wards. In my belief he sought to ease his heart with labour—it is one of the many ways by which men strive to run away from themselves.

It was a stern, gloomy world that waited us beyond the grounding of the boat's keel, a world of drab existence rather than full-blooded life. A spice of the danger they feared for me, had it brought some opulent sense of vigour with it, would have been welcome to vary the solemn silence of the rocks, the cramped sterility of stunted shrub and storm-bleached grass. Once, a brown-hided creature, half fox half wolf it seemed and a fox for size, broke cover to stare at us, more curious than frightened, and rarely, a dingy-feathered bird, short and stocky as the English starling but with a scarlet breast, fluttered among the low bushes—of other life we saw none except the sea-fowl.

One thing—the air was sweet and mild, though cloyed with dampness, and what else could it be with a low-hung sky over-head and a grey mist ready to drift in from the sea? But it was a dull, quiet land, a dreary, sorrowful land, a land to thank God for as a haven of refuge and then to spread wing, thanking God yet more, and sail away for the country of Hearts Desire.

And there was one thing more—the water was fresh and clean-tasting. After the water grown stale in casks aboard ship it seemed to me the sweetest water in the world. As I drank my fill I understood why God had made the Sibble Wards and left them stranded in this forlorn corner of His world—that men might know that His care and fore-knowledge were over all His creatures.

Of that afternoon I say no more. New and strange though the forlorn, dreary land was to us all in its treeless, lifeless desolation our stay ashore does not touch the South Adventure—it counted for no more than a passing mood of the sea. Towards sunset, that is to say about seven o'clock, we returned to the *Regina* with the boat's last trip for the day to find Captain Scotton in high good humour. The gear had stood the strain so nobly that, after all, there was little work to be done.

That pleased him for two reasons—that Hull, where he hailed from, had done its fitting so staunchly that neither sea nor wind could budge it, and that within three days it would be good-bye to the Sibble Wards.

With the first I sympathized. Let a man think well of his own town: when he does not it's nine chances in ten but the town has no cause to think well of him. But for the second I said, God be praised! for the woman's reason that Dave and I

could never even our odds till we were ashore with the adventure over and done with. There is no perspective on ship-board and Dave saw things too near at hand.

On the evening of the third day Ezra Plowden's fiddle was again brought out, and though, this time, there was no tub of punch to loosen the merriment there was an abandon, a boisterous freedom from constraint which was altogether new. Songs with a rousing chorus were sung, there were great guffaws of laughter, the quick pad of dancing feet, and through all, and leading all, Blair's voice whether in song or laughter. Nor was their light-heartedness anything to wonder at. Given a fair wind, they would be free from the Sibble Wards next day—homeward bound.

Homeward Bound! My own heart danced and sang within me at the thought, why should not theirs? Bygones were bygones for us all: for them the folly of Los Reyos, for me my five-year-old promise. Through storm and stress, through hazards of wind and sea, fierce tropic suns and fields of ice, we had made our South Adventure and were Homeward Bound! Had my heart not danced and sung it must have been dead indeed, and how full of life it was and the passions of life, none knew but Joan Sharland. Some day Dave would know—some day.

It was natural that I should be slow to sleep, perhaps natural that I should sleep heavily. The after-climax of the excitement, the soundless tranquil quiet that nursed us round, the soothing of the soft, moist air, all conspired together, and that last night in the Sibble Wards I slept as the dead sleep, as the foolish phrase runs.

But no heaviness of sleep could shut out the thunder at my door. So imperative was the clamour that I

roused, broad awake in an instant, and sat up, my heart fluttering painfully in its blind fright. Through the curtained port the dawn showed grey. Again came the insistent summons, sharp and impatient.

"Yes," I cried. "Yes, what is it? What is the matter."

And a voice called back, "Come on deck at once: d'you hear? At once." It was Trant's voice I thought: at least it was the voice that had cried out, "Los Reyos" at Captain Scotton's jollity.

"But why?" I answered. "Can't you tell me what is the matter?" This time it was Dave who replied, his voice very quiet and level.

"Mutiny, Joan. Come on deck as quickly as you can."

Then there was silence except for the sound of the water sucking under the quarter with the drift of the tide.

CHAPTER XXX

MUTINY

I sat dazed, staring at a broken knot-hole in the partition facing me. Always, now, when I am frightened, I see that knot-hole. Instead of thought clearing my brain I grew stupider with thinking. Mutiny? Never had the men worked so cheerily as the last four days, Captain Scotton had said so: last night they had danced, sung, made merry, to-day we were Homeward Bound, to-day—a second time repeated came the sudden clamour on the door. It sounded like the haft of a knife beaten impatiently against the panel with a man's full strength.

"Make haste, within there. No harm's meant you, but don't dawdle, d'you hear? Stir yourself." This time I was sure it was Trant's voice. He paused a moment as if he was listening, then went on in a lower tone, "Up with you on deck, you two, and bear in mind we'll stand no tricks."

"Dave," I cried, "is that you, Dave? Are you safe?"

"All safe, Joan," he called back. "Hal is with me. Everyone is safe, at least I think so. Better wear your cloak," he added, "it may be cold." Then came the rasp of feet on the companion followed by silence.

But not for long. Almost instantly Trant—I was

sure it was Trant—rapped for the fourth time, but less noisily. "I'm waiting," he said significantly.

Action unnumbed the brain: in the nimble haste of dressing the power of thought returned. Blair had played with us all, Blair and Trant and that ordained old hypocrite Ezra Plowden. Their stake in the game was a larger one than the mere wiping the slate clean of bygones. Scotton had said, wait till 10 South, then trust Tom Scotton! But Blair had been more cunning, more desperate perhaps: perhaps, too, he had caught some echo of Scotton's threat. Will Crisp might have heard, might have carried it forward. Scotton, in his angry contempt had not always guarded his voice, and Blair had waited for no trap to spring its catch in 10 South.

Nor was Scotton alone to blame. Innocently my my lord had hastened action—there was to be no return to Los Reyos. In the ice he had jeered at Blair's impotency and disappointment—there would be no use for his stolen muskets! Four days before I had forced home the disappointment; never would we return to Los Reyos! This was Blair's answer, this was why he was so friendly with Tollit and Sparrow, who had been loyal, this was why he had—

"Aren't you ready yet?" cried Trant sharply, beating the door as he spoke, this time with his fist. "Make haste: you won't want your pretty frills and fal-lals where you're going."

"Yes, yes." I cried back, working feverishly at buttons that slipped my fingers, "in two minutes more."

He swore rumblingly. "You'll have Blair down and the door in on top of you if you don't look out. He'll not wait, Blair won't."

That drove me. I was afraid of Blair, more afraid than I had been at Los Reyos. The man's cool-

headed, calculating persistence in good humour when he must have had hell and hate in his heart frightened me. Where might these not lead him? He had Dave and my lord at his mercy. Twice he had loosed murder on Father Macdonald—great necessities can stimulate as well as paralyze, the very terror which had shaken my fingers steadied them now and rapidly I finished dressing.

Then, with my hand outstretched to draw the bolt of the door I paused. Trant was stamping and cursing outside. No harm's meant you, he had said. That in itself was a warning since it was clear they must have thought of harm, and who was safe with Blair and his kind? Bring your cloak, said Dave—a warning again. Was I, who had followed the plough from the first grey of many a bitter winter's dawn, one to be afraid of a chill in this land of soft, moist airs? No! and Dave, as North-country bred as I was, knew it. The two minutes were more than up when I fastened the cloak at the throat, with the two pistols I knew best—pistols of my father's careful choosing, perhaps with such a crisis as this very morning in his mind—pushed one into each pocket at either side and newly primed. Then I opened the door.

I was right. It was Trant who stood digging his heel viciously into the deck. He looked side-long at me, scowling, but it was a shamefaced scowl I thought as he half made to hide the cutlass he held in his hand. Perhaps the touch of the pistols at either side gave me courage, for I flung a word at him.

"Mutiny!"

"There's no harm done," he answered blustering, "and there won't be, if there's reason."

"No harm? Is to steal a ship no harm?"

"Don't you drive us," he said with a nod. "I'm

warning you, and do you warn the others—don't you drive us. So far no one is hurt to signify, put it that way if you like. Up on deck, if you please; that's orders."

"Captain Blair's orders?"

"Ship's orders," he retorted, then added hastily, "though I've nothing to say against Blair. D'you want him down on top of you?"

I don't know what I might have answered, but at the same moment Dave's voice called, "Joan, Joan," and drawing the cloak about me I ran up the ladder. Nor do I know what realization caught me first, that the day had whitened, I think, and that the *Regina* swung head to sea. Then a dozen impressions seized upon me in the one instant, but all, for the moment, were lost in Dave's repeated call "Joan, Joan."

He stood in the middle of a file drawn across an angle of the stern, a file that parted to leave me room at his side. At once his arm went round me, drawing me close; and without a word spoken I was comforted, caring little for what might happen. The treasure stowed away in my lord's cabin no longer came between us. It was the old days of The Scaur back again with Dave and I lovers unheeding of them all. Unheeded too. No one but ourselves seemed to know how close he held me. Hal, from beyond him, crept round behind to my other side, pressing so near that the cloak almost hid him. He was very white, poor lad, but more from excitement than fear, for he smiled back when I smiled down to him; and so we three, who had no others of our kin in the world, stood together.

Beyond Dave, on his left, was my lord, beyond him was Captain Scotton next the rail. To my right were Father Macdonald, Mr. Eliot, Mr. Cuthbert and Hoggett—Hoggett I saw had a bloody kerchief

bound round his head, but nowhere else was there sign of hurt done. Behind us were five or six of the men, Oscroft and misshapen Carleton amongst them. Mr. Stenson I could not see at the moment.

In front, scattered about the poop, but mostly in a group shutting in the opposite angle of the stern, were the rest of the crew with Blair and Bemrose standing apart with Trant, who had followed me on deck. Ezra Plowden I caught sight of skulking behind the rabble in the corner. About half carried muskets, the rest cutlasses or pikes, all looted from the cases in the cuddy, but to my mind they looked more hang-dog and sullen and less formidably truculent than the day we anchored off Los Reyos. Or if that was not true of all, not of Floost and Harte and two or three more—it was of most.

Down below, my brain buzzing and dazed with bewilderment, I had been vaguely conscious of the noisy rumble overhead. Then it had all been a confusion of shuffling feet and inconsequent angry talk flung in jerked séntences, but now Captain Scotton's voice beat down all else. But though the hard voice scarcely ceased its rasping there is little that can be recalled: one half was curses, the other villainous sea phrases learned in those far-off days when he was still a fo'cksle hand with little hope of working aft to the poop, but phrases that bit and stung till Scotton was a greater danger to our lives than Blair himself.

My lord broke in, striving to stem the torrent, and was roundly abused for his pains. Then, as if the shift of target had given his vexed spleen fresh stimulus, Scotton turned on Blair again with so choice a sneering vileness that murder would have been done before us all if Bemrose had not dragged Blair back. He earned no thanks from Scotton.

"Let him be," he cried hoarsely. "I ain't afraid

of his likes. He? He hasn't the heart of a louse, I'll see him snivel and whine on Execution Dock yet, see if I don't! Aye! and all of y'e the drink'll leave alive, every man-jack at a rope's end—the only rope ye was ever fit to pull, see if I don't! Drink'll rot the most of ye, but I'll see Blair hang yet; aye, an' Floost, an' Plowden, an' Trant, an' Tollit—"

I lost the rest. Was Tollit won over, too? At Los Reyos Tollit had been staunch; somehow it hurt me that Tollit had gone over to the devil's side, I had always known him for a decent lad. Involuntarily I searched for him in the shifting rabble opposite and found him, slack-jawed and white of face, staring at Scotton who had fixed him with his fierce eyes. If he was a rascal he was plainly uneasy in his rascality.

"Tollit," I called out on the impulse, "Tollit——"

But Blair roared me down. Possibly he was not very sure of Tollit.

"Let the dog yap! What can he do but bark and snarl? Out with a boat, bullies, and ashore with them, then it's we for Los Reyos and our pockets full."

"You for Los Reyos?" sneered Scotton. "How will you fetch Los Reyos, ye lubbers? Who'll con the ship, ye damn fools."

"Mr. Stenson will see to that all right," answered Blair, and there was a pause. Then,

"Stenson!" roared Scotton, his face flaming, "Are y'e there, Stenson? D'you hear the blackguard?"

The uneasy, sullen group in the corner parted as if Scotton's roar had cleft a wedge through them and for the first time I saw Mr. Stenson. He was tied up to the rails in the very point of the angle, an arm to each rail. His coat was ripped to tatters, his shirt

wrenched open half-way down his chest, and from a cut across the forehead blood, now half dried, had trickled in two thin lines to his chin. Always it had seemed to me a thing of derision that a boy like Mr. Stenson should be set in command over the Blairs and Plowdens, and now my heart went out to him in pity, he was so young and so mishandled.

Perhaps in my distress I sobbed, or caught my breath with a gasp, for Dave's arm closed tighter round me and I heard his teeth grit; I know my eyes filled, but when I looked the second time I thought the boy had never so much seemed the man. Though his face was pale, and all the paler for the streaks of blood, his jaw was firm-set and his eyes as hard as Scotton's own.

"Aye," he answered, and his voice, like his eyes, was as hard as Scotton's, "I hear, but so long as I'm trussed like this they will get nothing out of me. D'you hear, Blair?"

"We'll get it," said Blair grimly. "Never fear but we'll get it, though we starve you into it where you stand."

"Aye," he retorted, "and where will the ship be while I'm starving? On the rocks, by God! Loose me and I'll make a bargain with you, keep me trussed and you may go to the devil your own way—and that'll be fast enough."

"Damme," cried Scotton, almost screaming with rage, "Damme, Stenson, would you make a bargain with these curs of—" In his excitement he broke the line, pushing forward, to be thrust back by Blair with a vicious jab of a musket butt.

As he staggered, gasping, Stenson answered the broken appeal with an ugly laugh.

"This isn't your quarter-deck, is it? I've had more than my share already. Look how they've

manhandled me. But I'll con no ship while I'm trussed. D'you hear, Blair?"

"There's more than Blair in this," said Bemrose. "What's your bargain, Mr. Stenson? I am sorry we had to manhandle you, sir, but it was your own fault, you fought so hard against us."

"Here's my bargain," said Stenson in the same hard voice, "and I'm talking to you all, mind you, for if you lose the ship, as you will, down you all go. Once clear to sea I'll take you wherever you want to go, on conditions."

"You are a cowardly swine, Stenson," said Cuthbert, speaking for the first time and very bitterly he said it. But Mr. Stenson gave him no answer, not even to look at him.

"Conditions?" repeated Blair, who wanted no conditions but feared Bemrose might oust him from his leadership. "What conditions?"

"These," he nodded at us, but avoided looking us in the face as he had avoided Mr. Cuthbert, "go scot free."

"Damn you," whipped out Scotton, "save your own carcase, y'e coward. We'll take nothin' through a traitor."

"Who wants them?" sneered Blair. "Didn't you hear me order out a boat ten minutes ago?"

"Aye," said Stenson quickly, "but they must have the boat left them. How else can they cross to Magelanick Land?"

"Agreed; two are enough for us."

"Arms, too; muskets and cutlasses as you had at Los Reyos. God knows what's beyond the valley."

This time Blair hesitated, but while he hung in the wind Ezra Plowden pushed to the front. "'Twas agreed there'd be no murder done. Would you have them starve?"

"Aye," jeered Blair. "If 'twas ordained."

"Well, 'tisn't," answered Plowden shortly, "and there's more here says so."

"Who?"

"I," said Tollit; "And I," "And I," "And I," cried three or four more.

"It's that or the rocks for you all," said Stenson, as Blair still hesitated. "Plowden is right; to send them ashore bare-handed is pure murder, and you know it. I'll not stir a hand unless you agree." At that Blair shrugged his shoulders. "It can do no harm; it's agreed. And since you're so soft, all of you, some grub'll go in the boat, but that's the end for them. Now what for yourself?"

CHAPTER XXXI

WE QUIT THE SHIP

THERE was a moment's pause.

"For myself," said Stenson slowly, "I want neither truck nor traffic with you; I won't work the ship, but once clear of the heads I'll lay her course and you will drop me wherever I name five hundred miles from Los Reyos. Now take it or leave it—but you can't do without me."

"Damn you for a coward," said Cuthbert. "Do you call yourself an Englishman?" Captain Scotton, I think, was beyond words, but I heard him drawing in his breath as if he snored.

Father Macdonald, on my right, astonished me. "Leave Stenson alone," he whispered under his breath. "A man must face the world his own way."

In the quiet that followed Mr. Cuthbert's bitter contempt, Blair looked at Bemrose and Trant, read assent in their eyes, nodded sullenly and turned to the now silent crew behind him. But his wrath was heaving. He may never have sailed with Avery, but this, I gathered, would not have been Avery's way.

"Well, sons, what do you say? To speak his mind is every man's right; that's the law on a free ship."

"To my mind it lies like this," began Plowden. "If so be as this thing is—"

"Oh! curse your palaver," roared Blair. "Which is it, lads, yes or no?"

The answering was diverse but there was no misjudging its meaning. There was, indeed, an obvious raising of a no less obvious depression as they began to see their way clear. The point at issue between some of them and Blair was not Mr. Stenson's necessity, they all knew that, but the surest means of securing their end—someone to con the ship. The aye was almost unanimous.

"Loose him," said Blair grudgingly. But with the loosing he grew civil. "I'm sorry, sir, you was hurt, but, as Bemrose says, it was no will of ours."

"Say no more," answered Stenson, stretching himself to ease the cramp in his limbs. "In your place I would have done the same; there's no catching fish without a barb to the hook." He paused and his eyes swept us in our corner almost for the first time. Never, I say, had I thought him so much the man. As his look passed me it stayed with a flicker for an instant, and at the clear, unabashed gaze my heart leaped suddenly, though I could not have said why. "I'll stay where I am," he went on, "then you'll know you have me safe. I said I would have nothing to do with running the ship and I won't, but if you take my advice you'll have them ashore right off. The sooner you are to sea the better."

"Damn you, Stenson," said Scotton heartily, "damn you for a cowardly cur, but you won't get to sea this morning."

"A Wind of God," said Father Macdonald, whispering a second time, but as if to himself. His teeth were set, his eyes shining and his look not at all the look of a man who reads Saint Thomas à Kempis for the pleasure and profit of it. "A Wind of God if ever there was one; pray Him it holds!"

It was then I became aware for the first time that the breeze, a steady, crisp, wholesome drift of air, was blowing full in our faces. Captain Scotton was right; with no trained seaman's craft to direct them they would never take the *Elizabeth Regina* through the narrow channel between the island and the rocky point of the inlet in the teeth of the wind.

But his gibe seemed news to Blair, for he looked aloft suddenly as if taken aback, then he waved a careless hand.

"A spell off will be no harm after the way the men have been driven these four days. Isn't that boat lowered yet?"

"Go easy," retorted Harte. "Who made you captain? The boat will be out in good time."

There might have been trouble between them there and then for Blair's empty fist—there was a musket in the other—clenched and his face grew dark. But my lord broke in; not as peacemaker I can swear, though he spoke civilly.

"Of course you will give us leave to add some extra clothing from down below, so that—"

"Damned a rag," roared Blair, glad to ease his evil temper where he dared. "What you stand up n is good enough; it'll last out your time where you're going, never fear."

"At least allow Mistress Sharland—"

I lost Blair's answer but Dave did not. Loosing his hold of me abruptly, almost with violence, he leaped for Blair bare-handed and would have fallen upon him had not my lord dragged him back with both hands.

"You cur—you foul swine—" panted Dave, struggling desperately to shake off the grip that held him. But my lord's strength was too great, and while he still struggled intervention came whence none looked for it.

"None of that," said Plowden, and a murmur rose behind him. "D'you hear me, Blair? None of that. I'll not stand for it."

Round swung Blair, all the vexed devil in him flaming from his eyes. "Y'e won't, won't y'e? then lie for it," and driving out his clenched fist he felled Plowden, sending him spinning along the deck. "'Twas ordained, you meddling fool," he jeered and turned fiercely on the murmurers. "Y'e can't have it both ways—y'e can't have your milk and water livers, and your pockets full at Los Reyos, not both; and its Los Reyos for us, hey? What harm's done them?" he jerked his head towards us, "Scot-free, unhurt, guns, grub, a boat under them, what more do they want? It's too much, that's what it is—too much. Then comes this ordained old fool with his I won't have this and I won't have that; he's got his answer and be damned to him."

As the murmurs died down Plowden slowly rose, stumbling to his feet, wiping blood from the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand and staring about him vacantly. As more than once before, he looked to have grown shrunken and old beyond his years; his jaw was trembling, his full, blue eyes dull and void of expression. For a moment he stood between the two groups, looking from one to the other helplessly, then, his face always turned to Blair, he sidled towards the end of the line where Scotton stood against the rail.

"Ordained it is," he said, slowly wiping his mouth the while. "A bloody end to you and your like, bully Blair, that's what's ordained." He turned to my lord, saluting as he had saluted in Dunquester, but with a shaking hand. "Ye spoke for me once before, your worship; for the Lord's sake speak for me again and the old man won't fail you."

Scotton, across whom he spoke, stared him hard in the face without a sign of life in his fierce little eyes, but my lord stood aside, making room for him to pass.

"Thank you humbly, your worship," said Ezra Plowden with another duck of his head, and slipped between them.

For a moment I hoped Tollit would have followed him, so uneasy and shifting was he; but while his mind hung between I will and I dare not, Blair burst out:

"There'll be one less to share at Los Reyos and one more to rot ashore! That," and he wagged his head at the boat which now hung out-board, "will never see Magelanick Land, never in life! It's rot or drown," and Tollit shrank back.

Thereafter things moved quickly. Six muskets and as many cutlasses were laid under the thwarts, powder, shot, and ball stowed into the after locker, a kid of beef, a bag of biscuits, even a keg of rum slung into the bows and a few utensils flung after them; I will say this for the scoundrels, mutineers and thieves, aye, pirates though they were, they did not cheat us.

And all in silence. For that I was deeply thankful. To me it was very solemn. It was a supreme farewell, almost a passing out of life. Back to my mind, clear and sorrowful, came the memory of that June night when my father had gone out with the tide. This did not differ so greatly—chiefly that he was willing to go and we were not. But for me there was the same sense of separation, the same awed sense of an undiscovered country, and Captain Scotton's raucous resentment would have been as much an outrage as the coarse voice of the world intruding its trivialities that night the tide ebbed.

But Captain Scotton, too, was silent. Soon all was ready, then he spoke:

"Go you," he said curtly, the gesture of his arm embracing us all and not without dignity. "I'm last to leave my ship." But at the head of the stairs he turned to look back at Stenson, "You poor coward!" He did not speak loudly, but in the strained quietness I heard him and winced as I climbed down to the waiting boat; the cold contempt was worse than any passionate curse.

In utter silence we took our places in the boat, Captain Scotton last of all, and pushed off. I sat next him in the stern with Dave and Hal at the other side of me; opposite were my lord and Father Macdonald. As we settled down my cloak flapped open so that a pistol-butt showed and I saw Scotton's eye flash as he caught sight of it. Then I turned to look back.

The rails were packed almost as they had been that day in Whitcroft. From the angle of the poop Blair stared morosely down on us, leaning on his musket, his wizen-face sullen in a scowl. With his back to the taffrail stood Mr. Stenson, Tollit's white face peering across his shoulder; Bemrose hung a yard or two behind and all were silent. From Mr. Stenson my eyes fell a few feet to the tarnished gilt letters on the rusty black of the stern, *Elizabeth Regina*, *Hull*, and the tears came. Unconsciously I had grown to love the old ship as one loves a home where one has faced the solemn vicissitudes of life. But as the sob shook me Dave laid his hand on mine and the closing of his fingers comforted me. Whatever the chill of separation, thank God the love of those His mercy has still left us can warm the the worst desolation of the heart. So, with my chin on my breast, I sat fighting for self control.

We rowed slowly, yet steadily, and with firm strokes. Every man's face was turned backward except Scotton's—he faced ahead grimly. Suddenly a thrill, a ripple as it were, swept across the boat, and Father Macdonald cried, "I was sure of it, God be thanked!" He spoke softly, almost to himself. But it roused me, and as I looked up there was a splash; Stenson was in the water, swimming towards us with all his power. There was an instant commotion on the *Regina*, a rush of feet, gesticulations, a score of voices shouting and no man heeding, with Blair and Bemrose roaring oaths and threats.

At the turmoil rather than the splash Captain Scotton turned and, still facing astern, flung up a hand.

"Backwater all!" he cried, then, half uncertain, "Eh? What's all this?"

"It's Stenson," said Father Macdonald, breathing hard through shut teeth. "He played them. I thought he did, I always thought he did. Swim! Stenson, swim—swim!"

"Played them?" said Scotton, "and I cursed him for a coward!" Then he too raised his voice in a shout. "Good lad, Stenson, good lad! We'll come to meet you."

But Stenson, rearing himself with a strong breast stroke, cried back, "No, no; stay where you are, it's safest for all."

"Yes, stay where you are, it's safest," echoed Father Macdonald, though his hands were twitching in the instinct to seize an oar and backwater with all his strength.

And without a doubt he was right. For now musket balls began to snip the water beside us, at first one here and there in a dropping fire, then faster, thicker, and even as they fired on us they

shouted to Stenson to come back. Their thought was to drive us further away, drive us to such a distance that Stenson had no choice but to drown or return. For the moment he was safe from them; to shoot him was to lose their one chance of a brain to con the ship, so they poured their fire on us.

With a sweep of his arm Dave lifted me to the bottom of the boat and slipped into my place, screening both me and Hal with his body. Nor would he let me stir.

"I'll be all right, sweetheart," he said, pressing me down, a strong hand on my shoulder. But the thud of a bullet in the gunnel gave that the lie, and in the shaken nerve of the moment two or three oars caught the water in a strong stroke. Round swung Scotton, his face flaming as it had flamed when he had cursed Blair.

"Backwater, damn ye." Diving he jerked a pistol from my cloak pocket and flourished it forward. "See that? I'll blow the head off the first gutter-pip of a coward that pulls a stroke, d'ye hear? What are ye feared of any way? We're nearest here in the stern, ain't we? They can't hit you without hittin' us first."

But Carleton, near the bow, dropping his oar with a cry, gave that the lie too, and a kind of groaning shudder ran through the boat. Next moment he caught it up again.

"All right, sir, it's nothing but a scratch," he said cheerily, and hung on his oar ready to pull the moment word was given.

Nor was there long to wait, though the time hung as I never knew time hang before. Two minutes first and last, perhaps three, perhaps less, brought the end. Held down as I was under cover I could see nothing, but through the zip-zip of the bullets I heard the lap of water and the pant of deep breathing.

then the clap of a hand upon the stern, and at the wet pad a roar went up from all on board. The oars were double-banked now and every man leaned forward on his stroke. But Scotton held up a hand.

"Wait the word and do as I tell you," he said curtly. "We'll tow him. Grip a wrist each, gentlemen both. Aye, that's it. Now then, lads, paddle —gently, or you'll rip the arms outen him."

And little by little, with a restrained quiet that spoke a splendid courage we crept away through the splash and whir of their fire, Mr. Stenson gripping the stern of the boat and gripped in turn by my lord and Father Macdonald. Then, from a forward thwart someone, I don't know who, spoke:

"My God! if they turn the swivel on us!"

Fiercely Captain Scotton caught him up.

"Let them turn the swivel and be damned. Better die men, here and now, than rot like curs ashore! But they'll turn no swivel: such gutter-pips don't know how."

Nor did they. Presently we were beyond range and eased up, and forward of the after thwart Mr. Stenson climbed on board. Leaning forward, Captain Scotton held out his hand.

"Stenson, there on the ship, I said——"

"Yes, sir," laughed Stenson, a boy again, "you said just what I wanted you to say and so made it all easy."

"Aye, aye," and Scotton gripped him hard. "Aye, aye, ye understand, I see," and I do not doubt he did.

CHAPTER XXXII

THROUGH THE DARK OF THE NIGHT

THERE are some who, hearing my story by the safe quiet of their own firesides have sneered at us for putting up so poor a fight. Tame sheep! they say. What, after all, were the odds? Two, or a little more, to one, no more. Men who were men have faced and overthrown heavier odds by far before now and for less cause. Yet what happened? Out of a dozen, two get a clout across the head and at once the rest cry *peccavi!* So they jeer at us. These are of the kind who, with as little patriotism as wisdom, pour public contempt on our generals in the field if they fail at the first blow, and so weaken the nation's heart, themselves stirring no finger.

Their opinion is not mine. For what were the true odds? We had a dozen men or thereabouts it is true, but the dozen were bare-handed and without a plan in their heads, while against them were more than twice as many, well-armed and agreed before hand. More than that. Not only had they the force of surprise on their side but we were set upon singly, and what gain would it have been for any one of our men to throw away his life with a Los Reyos musket at his head? None that I can see. Yet in this world of fireside critics there will always be those who do not know to sneer at those who do.

Once ashore my lord, with Captain Scotton's tacit consent, took the lead, command it could hardly be called. As the tide was still making, the boat was pulled up beyond high water mark; then he recommended the lighting of a fire that we might have food, not only to put heart in us but for sheer need—no one had eaten as yet that day. The spot chosen was round the turn of the valley where there was shelter from the east wind, and there we had the first taste of our difficulties, fuel being scarce because of the absence of trees.

But at length sufficient dry brush was collected, and being so light, the mere dry twigs of shrubs, it burned up quickly with a fierce heat. Perhaps I, the one woman of them all, should have played cook. But there are times when a man is better than a woman even at a woman's work, and to cook in The Scaur kitchen and on the open shore of the Sibble Wards are very different things. The meal was a better one than I could have produced.

For drink we had water from the river dashed with rum, weaker for what we may call the Whitcroft folk and stronger for the men. I would have none of it at first, but Dave constrained me, and I think he was wise. From time to time one of us would go round the bend to watch the inlet lest the pirate scoundrels—and they were no better—should take us by surprise; but no boat was lowered, neither then nor later.

It was after we had eaten with a better appetite—I as well as the rest—than I had thought possible that Ezra Plowden astonished us. We sat silent, our thoughts heavy and brooding—I judge others by myself—pondering what the morrow and the days after it would have in store when Plowden spoke, very civilly, humbly indeed.

"If you please, your worship, when do we go back to the ship?"

Father Macdonald laughed and Mr. Stenson, who had dried his clothes after a fashion, smote his thigh with his palm and laughed too. The rest of us—we all sat round the windward side of the fire—stared first at Plowden and then at my lord to whom he spoke. But it was Father Macdonald who answered:

"To-morrow, just before daylight if the wind holds."

Plowden looked at him for a moment, cogitating, perhaps raking up a memory of some past adventure, then,

"Aye," he said, "that will be a good time, as good as the best."

And my lord, who might at times be slow to conceive but was always quick to comprehend, chimed in heartily, "The best of times—if the wind holds. But are we enough?"

"The odds were greater when we took the Danish ship in Sierra Leone in '83," answered Plowden.

"Yes, but they were Danes and these are English."

"Damn Blair for an Englishman," replied Plowden pithily, and those beside him murmured agreement. Then he turned to me as if finishing his sentence, "By your leave, Young Madam, by your leave."

"Enough to venture," struck in Father Macdonald, his eyes shining as they had shone on the *Regina*, and speaking as the student of Cæsar's Commentaries rather than of St. Thomas à Kempis. "But it was you, sir," and he turned to Captain Scotton, who sat moodily by, "who first put the thought in my head," which seemed to me straining the truth when I remembered his whispered comments on the Winds of God as we stood side by side on the poop. "Do you

remember what you said? 'Better die men, here and now, than rot like curs ashore."

That roused Scotton. He was, I think, older than we supposed, and the loss of his ship had dazed him.

"The swab's right," he said. 'O' course we're going back. And the wind will hold; it's as steady as the Trades. And you're right, too; to-morrow about half-past four is the time." He looked hard at me. "If I'd had one of them pistols, Young Madam, there would be a blackguard less in the world now."

"And some honest men, too," said my lord drily. "It is better as it is, Scotton. They'd have murdered every soul of us! And to-morrow Mistress Sharland will keep her pistols, for no man can tell what the end may be." A gleam of humour lit his eyes. "Have you any plan, Macdonald? The Church Militant, you know."

But there was no answering smile on Father Macdonald's face.

"A man is given his manhood to do justice and right the wrong, and in that service every robe is God's own uniform," he replied. "As to a plan, there is little room for one, and beyond a certain point no forethought even is possible. How can we guess what we shall find on board? But my suggestion is that, leaving Catlett and Carleton to guard Mistress Sharland and the boys—"

"Begging your pardon, sir," interrupted Carleton very briskly, "but this here scratch is nothing—nothing at all. There's no need to leave me behind."

"But there is need that Mistress Sharland should be guarded," said Father Macdonald. And my lord struck in,

"Let us hear Father Macdonald to the end; he has seen more fighting than all of us put together." As to Dave, I dared not look him in the face, for I

knew how he must be torn, betwixt his fears for me and his resentment at inaction.

"It is agreed there must be a guard," went on Father Macdonald. "Leaving that guard, let it be who you will, while it is still dark the rest of us will row out to the ship and lie hidden under the rake of the stern until there is light enough at least to know friend from enemy; after that——" He broke off. "It is no plan—no plan at all, but what better can we do? God guide us!"

It was I who answered him, and I spoke as what they had called me in jest—Captain Joan; that is, boldly and frankly, like one of themselves.

"Not that plan—at least, not the first part of it. It was not to bide ashore while others spent life for my sake that my father taught me what he did. Where you go I go."

Then came the hubbub! Not a man of them, forecastle men and all, but cried me down. If I had proposed to go single-handed, they could hardly have raised more objection. Did I guess at all what lay before them? This was no woman's work, this was —but the urgings can be guessed easily enough. I sat listening, holding Dave's hand under a fold of the cloak till they had quieted.

Woman's work? Perhaps it was not woman's work to come on this South Adventure at all. Some thought so, but I took my own way, and I say this for myself, I came prepared for the hazard, let it be what it might, not to sit shivering ashore while others took my place, for I know it is I who have brought this on us. But apart from all that, I don't like the leaving ashore. If you win, how are you going to hold desperate men while you weaken your force sending a boat for us? And if we lose, what then? God forbid! but if they sink the boat, as they well

may, or if it is not possible for the remnant to regain the boat, or if they follow the beaten remnant ashore, what better am I?"

"But if you go and they sink the boat," began Father Macdonald.

"Let me fall into the hands of God, and not into the hands of men," I answered. "And in any case so it would be while I have a pistol; for me there can be no taking alive." And Dave's hand closed on mine with such a grip that the bones ached.

In silence they looked from one to another. Then Mr. Cuthbert spoke.

"Either way it makes little difference to Mistress Sharland that I can see, and it gives us two more men."

"Then, too," said I, "with me in the boat, holding it ready for you to come back in case—"

"If you will stay in the boat," said my lord, "that ends it. You will be as safe there as here."

"There'll be no coming back," said Plowden. "What's ordained's ordained, and Blair'll never see Los Reyos. You come, Young Mistress, and don't you be feared." He paused with that old duck of the head I remembered so well. "Begging your pardon, worships all, for stepping out o' my place, but 'twill be as I say."

Backwards and forwards they tossed the talk after that, almost every man putting in his word, but in the end it was left much as Father Macdonald had proposed. And indeed, what other plan was possible but to creep out under cover of the darkness, pray for a surprise, and let each man do the best he could.

Of the rest of that day I say but little. It, too, was like a mood of the sea, a thing to pass, leaving no deep mark on life. Only Dave and I drew very close together, not knowing if the coming of the sun would

find us both, or either, indeed, in life. My own thought was that, if one must go, then better both. But his black mood seemed altogether lifted, and though we said little and had hearts heavy with doubt, it was not doubt of each other, so we were not unhappy.

For the rest, most wandered aimlessly over the forlorn valley, or climbed the barren rocks. Game there was none, but my lord had a musket or two fired, that those on board might think we were settling down in camp until the sailing of the ship left our way clear to search for Magelanick Land away to the west of us, but no waste of powder and shot was allowed. About two o'clock we dined, and towards sunset took our third meal, with more relish than I would have thought possible. There was little speaking, and every man seemed very soberly thoughtful.

After dark those who could sleep slept—there were enough who could not close eyes to keep watch, and the watch was strict. Always there was the fear before us that the pirates would land in an attempt to capture an officer to con the ship. For me a shelter was contrived in a niche of the rocks with the help of the shrubby bushes, a kind of veronica Father Macdonald called it, but though I rested I cannot pretend that I slept, and it was a relief when at four o'clock the camp was roused.

Rarely in our five days' ashore had I seen the sun, and now the grey skies which seem the common canopy of the Sibble Wards fought for us. So far from being seen from the *Regina* we would have to grope to find her in the dark. Yet no precaution was omitted, for though little, nothing indeed, was said, all knew the venture to be a desperate one, only less desperate than the hope of ever finding a road to

England by way of the unknown coast of Magelanick Land. So all that might glimmer pale in the gloom was covered, the oars muffled, and to lessen sound no more than two rowed and these with slow caution.

Once night fell the boat had been kept eased with the shift of the tide that there might be no grating of the keel in putting off. Except myself all, even the boys, were either barefooted or in their stockinged feet for fear of a boot-rasp as we crept seaward, or when the supreme crisis came of climbing on board. And so in dead silence we put off, Mr. Cuthbert and Oscroft at the oars, dipping gently, pulling slowly with a steady, quiet stroke and lifting the blade clear of the water with watchful care. The wind had fallen, and though the tide was flowing there was no lap of driven water against the bow.

Our places were much as when we had come ashore, except that the two boys, Hall and Will Crisp, sat in the bottom of the boat at my feet. Dave held me close to him, his arm fast round me, my head against his shoulder, and we gave not a thought as to whether others saw us. If we lived, what would a kindly jest matter? if either died the memory would be a consecration for whoso lived while life lasted. What my thoughts were is between God and myself, only I cannot even now recall that hour without the tears wetting my eyes and my heart going up to Him in prayer and thankfulness. None spoke, it was with the stealthy silence of the shadow of a cloud on the face of the waters that we crept seawards.

Captain Scotton steered, using the denser gloom of the land at either side as a guide, not even with the east a faint grey was the *Regina* visible. Had the steady drift inwards of the wind until after sunset not given the lie to the possibility we would have thought she had sailed, so void was the darkness.

Then, after twenty minutes' paddling his trained eye saw what I missed and he raised a hand.

"Steady, there," and we crept forwards yet more slowly.

Soon I also saw her, not the hull but the masts and cross spars black against the dull grey of the coming dawn, as I saw her I shivered and Dave bent down.

"Cold, Joan lass?"

"No, Dave, but it is coming," I whispered and his clasp upon me tightened. There was no need to ask what I had in my thought.

Next the hull showed, like the loom of a great rock, and in towards it we crept almost inch by inch. No wraith of mist blown over the face of the deep was ever more silent. Mr. Cuthbert and Oscroft scarcely touched the water now and yet held themselves in readiness for a dash at the first alarm on board, it was understood that, let come what might, there was no going back. But there was no alarm, and presently the shadow of the raking stern overhead darkened the night. The first part of our adventure was over.

Yet even then the oars were not laid in board, partly for the risk of noise, partly because they would be needed again presently, but also partly lest the strain upon Mr. Stenson, who held the boat's nose to the *Regina's* rudder-post, should be too severe, for the tide was lapping past us rapidly. And there we lay till the night had so far faded that we knew each other's faces the length of the boat. Twice we had heard a step on the poop overhead, as if the watch peered shorewards across the inlet for news of us, but there were no voices.

"Now, lads," said Scotton, and Mr. Stenson letting go his hold the boat drifted a yard or two with the

tide, and very quietly was swung wide of the quarter.

After a few slow strokes Oscroft noiselessly lifted in his oar that we might draw along side, Mr. Cuthbert rowing on with the helm against him till Mr. Stenson had caught the main chains. Inch after inch we drew forward and one by one they climbed into the chains, as many as could find foothold, and from that on board, the rest following. Stooping, one of the last, Dave kissed me on the mouth three times with a passion that sent me whimpering.

"God keep you, Joan my heart, be brave, dear lass," then he, too, was gone, and I sat shivering in the boat alone with the boys at my feet. Mr. Stenson had fastened the painter, and with the tide we drifted to its full length, keeping clear of the *Regina's* side. The night was still very grey.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW THE REGINA WAS RETAKEN

BE brave!

I think men at times expect the impossible from women. I do not pretend to courage but for myself I had no fear, fear comes of self-consciousness, and I had no room for thought except for Dave. And how could I be brave for Dave with such a passionate farewell shaking me? Some good-byes are only, Till we meet again! This was not one of these. Nor was that all. After the first pad of feet on the deck there had fallen silence, then came a shout raising the alarm and the firing of a musket—how could I be brave for Dave? It was asking too much of nature.

Provided the deck was clear there was, I knew a plan to make a dash for the forecastle, two or three were to race up the ladder, and slip over its combings the cover of the small hatch giving direct access to the men's quarters, fastening it down. The others were to close the door, barricading it with the scuttle-butt and all the loose hamper of the deck.

No doubt our berths aft were occupied by the bigger rascals, but this would level the odds for a time. And the deck had been clear, the dash had been made. But a single cry had followed the musket shot, there had been high words fiercely spoken, the noise of a scuffle, of a struggle, then a fall, all clear in the quiet of the grey dawn. Who had

fallen? Knowing nothing, how could I be brave for Dave?

The two boys at my feet looked up at me, white-faced through the gloom, as I strained to listen for some hint to relieve my terrors. Hal, groping, caught my hand and my fingers closed over his, but it was all involuntary. All my conscious being was aboard the ship with Dave. The sounds had changed: there was still the noise of scuffling, of struggling, of naked feet padding upon the deck, but now there was no outcry, no voice, or none but a moaning groan that set my teeth chattering though I tried hard to clench them. After that, blent with them, driven through them, I heard two other sounds—a desperate clamour of wood on wood and a soft pad, pad, of other naked feet in front of the poop, a rush half way along the deck, then a rush aft again. So far we had succeeded; but for the terrible moan of pain I could have thanked God, with it in my ears I dared not. How could I thank God for success if Dave lay hurt?

While my raw nerves trembled and tingled my brain was clear, perhaps the clearer for the agony of doubt that drove the nails into my palm in an effort of self-control. We had succeeded; the frantic battering was on the shut fo'cksle door, the scuffle of padding feet and clatter across the deck, the strengthening of the barricade. But those who slept aft were roused, that much the checked rush forward told me; in two minutes—No! in twenty seconds, half naked or not, they would be out upon us with their muskets—Blair and the rest—and we in confusion. Pushing Hal aside I started up and cried "Dave! Dave! Dave!" with all my strength.

The rasping, dragging scuffle ceased, there was an instant's silence, then my heart leaped in relief as Dave's voice called back,

"Joan lass—Joan, are you safe?"

"Yes, Dave, yes, quite safe," I answered, "but they're awake aft, they'll be on you any moment. Chance leaving what you're at and be ready for them."

Again there was quiet, but through the desperate battering on the door I caught a whisper of curt voices and up both sides of the deck came the patter of running feet, then a throaty roar with an answering roar, the snap, snap of muskets, the clatter of steel and a din indescribable. Standing where I stood I listened, trembling, too full of dread for prayer, unless it be that the earnest yearning of the dumb soul is itself prayer, wordless though it is, and I in part believe it.

Hal had me by the skirts now and Will Crisp, no coward at all, was openly whimpering like a child in the dark. It was the inaction that killed the courage in us, the waiting in ignorance, life and death on the turn of a hazard five yards away and we ignorant how the die fell. We could hear the rasp, the rattle, the clang, the stroke, the jostle, the caught breath of a hurt, the spat-out oath; we could feel the sway and swing, the passionate pulse of the struggle; we could taste and smell the reek of the smoke; every sense but sight was quick, and the blindness was torment. How could I be brave for Dave?

After the first shock there had been no more firing; battling for life hand to hand where was the leisure to load? Now, as I listened, the fight broke up, at least in part; there was a rush of feet along the deck followed hard by other feet. Past the boat they raced, then came a crashing stumble as the foremost fell with almost in the same instant the thud of a blow; feet stole off and somewhere in the din there was a patch of grim silence. Who lay there in the grey of

the dawn? Dave? The ignorance was intolerable, and on the instant I resolved to end it. This, too, came home to me with a rush—it was not to play coward, hiding away in a boat, that John Sharland had made me as much a man as he could.

But in his schooling he had taught me that coolness was as much a man's virtue as courage. Incautious haste is a near friend to failure. Very carefully I examined and shook up the priming of both pistols, dropped the cumbersome cloak, opened the loose bosom of my dress and pushed in the shorter-barreled one so that the butt lay ready; the other I carried in my hand. Stooping I kissed Hal.

"Be ready, you and Will, to help in the boat if needs be." There was nothing either could do, but the sense of a trust might keep them out of harm's way.

"Joan, Joan," he cried, "you're not going?"

"Yes, Hal dear, I must; be ready and watch, you and Will."

Climbing across the thwarts as quietly as I could I laid down the pistol a moment while, hauling on the painter, I drew the boat's nose to where it was made fast, picked up the pistol and crawled into the chains; then I let the boat drift again. Its side had grated, bumping against the ship; but that was no longer of consequence—the din on the *Regina* drowned the rasp. As rapidly as the hampering pistol would allow I climbed the ship's side, and as I clambered I became conscious, though I gave the change no heed, that the furious battering against the fo'cksle door had ceased; there was still noise, but it was muffled, lacking the old hollow sharpness.

Once seated on the bulwarks I paused a moment, panting, as much perhaps from excitement as from breathlessness. The dawn was still very grey; not

more than ten minutes in all had passed since we had pushed out from under the shelter of the stern. Against the solid mass of the poop a welter of shadows shifted. Had they held still I could have recognised them but the interweaving of one with the other baffled me. Then I looked down. Almost beneath me, half in the scuppers and half on the deck, sprawling forward with outstretched arms lay—who? With a great fear in my heart I swung my feet in-board and slipped to the deck, letting myself sink to a crouch at his side in the one movement. It was Ezra Plowden.

He lay half on his face, his cutlass a foot or two away from his loosened grasp. There was a dabble of blood above his ear, a dabble that had oozed, spreading downward to his neck. As I stooped I confess to a sense of gladness, not that it was Plowden, but that it was not Dave, nor am I ashamed, love counts for little if in life and death our dearest do not come first, let who may suffer. A pagan sentiment, I am told, but I do not believe that human love can ever be separated from a wholesome paganism. The pistol hindered me so I pushed it into the inconvenience of my skirt pocket; then getting an arm under Plowden's head I raised him. He groaned, shifting, but instantly I laid him back. Opposite, just across the deck was the galley door, open, and against the dark—the further door was closed—I saw a figure stir, then a face looked out. It was Harte. Reaching, I laid hold of Plowden's cutlass and stood up; the same moment Harte came forward a step or two, the ramrod still in the musket he had been loading.

For a moment we stood with half the deck between us, then he laughed.

"Come aboard, Cap'n Joan!" he jeered mockingly,

and laughed again. "By God! they'll pay for this or you will."

I answered him nothing, but moved a little aside to clear my feet of Plowden. Then Harte came forward another step or two. I thought he was going to call out, but he changed his mind; no doubt he saw himself the greater man for taking such a prisoner and hostage singlehanded. His idea was clear; with me in his hands he could stop the fight and dictate terms. Clearing the ramrod he slipped it into the eye-holes under the barrel and swung the musket twice or thrice by the muzzle.

"Do you give up, or must I clout you on the head as I clouted Plowden?" he asked, almost suavely. But as I still answered nothing his savagery boiled up in an oath. "What can you do, you fool? I could bash out your brains with a stroke! But I won't; it's alive we want you—alive!" and again he laughed.

Still I answered nothing, only watched his eyes as my father had bidden me watch in such a case. In the boat I had shaken with terror, but now my hand was steady, the suffocating beat of the heart had sobered, and I was unconscious of fear. Suddenly I saw what I looked for—the narrowing of the lids, the glint of a purpose. With another oath he pushed the butt of the musket almost into my face and just as suddenly I shifted the cutlass. In astonishment at the threat he drew back, only to rush forward swinging the musket.

"You'll have it, will you? Well, then, take it!"

At no time would he have been a match for me, least of all in his blind rage and contempt. Then, too, his need to take me alive clogged him: he dared not put heart into the blow and between his contempt and hesitancy I got in my stroke. And I struck hard, struck with the arm of Joan of the plough-tail

schooled by John Sharland, and he went down like an ox, the words still in his mouth.

But the noise of our scuffle had been heard aft. Dave turned, saw me, and sank his guard in surprise. Up over his head Floost, his back against the poop wall, heaved a clubbed musket and but for the mercy of God and John Sharland's schooling it would have mattered little to me how the fight ended. But with the clatter of the Dutchman's musket on the deck as I fired the woman in me sickened, and I fell in a heap —a third between Plowden and Harte.

Yet my one shot did more than send Floost down with a broken shoulder. The surprise of it forced a moment's pause from which the attack rallied first, driving the defence into the cuddy passage—a vantage easy to hold from its narrowness but with the defect of its quality. And with this weakness, it could be taken in the rear by way of the companion; and it was by way of the companion that Father Macdonald, Carleton and another forced an end. Break out in front Blair could not, and had they wished the three could have shot him and his fellow scoundrels down from the rear.

All that I heard later. When I came to myself I was stretched on the galley floor, with my head against Dave's knee and Dave dabbling my temples with a wet cloth—Surely an ignominious ending to Captain Joan's stout bravery! For a moment I lay hardly conscious of anything but that beyond the open door the dawn had whitened, then suddenly I remembered.

"Dave dear, are you hurt?"

"No, Joan, not a touch—nothing at all, nothing. But you——"

"Dave, are you sure, quite sure?"

"Quite sure," and he laughed cheerily, but more I

think, to reassure me than from merriment. "And you, Joan?"

"Harte called me a fool and I suppose I am one. Dave what has happened?"

"It's all right," he answered. "I always told you it would be."

"All right for everybody? for my lord—Father Macdonald, everybody?" At that he hesitated, the cheery smile dying out of his eyes. "Tell me, Dave," and I pushed myself to my knees, rising stiffly.

"Some cuts and bruises, Joan, nothing dangerous, but—" and again he hesitated.

"Tell me, Dave, please."

"Poor Oscroft; Blair shot him as we ran aft when you called to us. Joan, they might have shot us all but for you: it was you who saved the ship—saved it twice over."

"Poor Oscroft!" I was too grieved and sick of heart to find the comfort he intended. Tears came tumbling down my cheeks, and I could say no more. Dave gathered me into his arms.

"Joan, lass, God knows I am as bitterly sorry as you can be. But needs must that a man die sometime and Oscroft died well—died the best of deaths. Sorry though I am, I am proud for Oscroft, as you would have been proud if David Catlett lay where Oscroft lies."

"Oh, Dave! Dave!" I cried, shivering at the thought, even while my selfishness found comfort in the strong arms warm about me. Then, after a moment's pause, I asked, "Is Oscroft the only one?"

"On our side, thank God, yes. On theirs Shard is dead and I think Bemrose. It was Bemrose we heard on the poop. We caught him forward near the fo'cksle door and—"

"I heard," I said, and shivered again at the

remembrance of the groaning moan that had so frightened me for Dave. "You closed the fo'cksle?"

"Yes, but there's no credit to us in what happened there. Tollit, Sparrow, and some others, were never true Blair's men. He swept them off their feet with his windy tales of rollicking ashore on the Los Reyos treasure. But the way he treated Plowden vexed them first, then the shooting at the boat showed them stark murder. That was not their idea at all, and when they got their chance they came back to their duty. They turned on Trant and the rest while they tried to break down the door, and for them the slate is wiped clean.

"And for the others?" I asked, and asked not without dread, remembering Captain Scotton's bitter vindictiveness.

"They have their lives," he answered with a hardness unlike Dave. "That much was promised Blair when he surrendered. If Scotton had had his way—but more than Oscroft must have died if we had fought to a finish and my lord over-ruled him. If they laid down their arms they should go scot-free—as we did yesterday and on the same terms, a boat, six muskets, six cutlasses and the food we left ashore." I suppose he saw some pity in my eyes, for he burst out, "Marooning's too good for them, Joan: in that Scotton's right. If it was not that he had to win over Tollit and some more of us Blair would have murdered us every one in our sleep. But to grant the terms saved life, and I don't deny that my lord was right."

"But Dave, you heard what Mr. Cuthbert and the others said yesterday—they'll never get clear."

"Never!" said Dave heartily, "never, and so thank God His justice will be done later or sooner—that's one comfort."

"Dave, where is Hal?"

"Below: he is better away from such sights."

It was then that Carleton looked in at the galley door: whether he had been sent, or came of his own accord, I do not know. His left arm was bandaged below the elbow.

"They are just putting off," he said, and disappeared like a man who had no mind to lose any part of a show.

"What will you do?" said Dave. "Go, or bide where you are?"

For a moment I hesitated. Mutineers and murderers though they were, I had no wish to seem to glory in their failure. But there were others to be thought of, others who were loyal, who had risked life for me. Always I remembered that, gloss it how they might, in its true essence the risk was for me. Was it fair, then, to say, I take no part with you?

"Let us go, Dave."

While we talked I had heard the shamble of feet on the deck and occasionally a rough voice, mostly rapping out an oath, but had given no thought to either sound; now, as we crossed to the poop I understood both—Blair and his crew were being passed one by one to the boat. But before the poop was reached I was shivering and whimpering again with no thought of glory or triumph, for though Dave bade me not look to the left he was too late.

Between the poop and the deck-house three lay who could be guessed at. They lay together and yet apart, for half the deck separated Oscroft from the two who had died fighting for the wrong. But even while I trembled that flush of pride which Dave had spoken of thrilled to my heart. For England's flag wrapped Oscroft in its folds, the red cross of St. George and the white of St. Andrew lying upon his breast as in a benediction—the benediction of, Blessed

are the dead who have died for the right. Over Shard and Bemrose a strip of sail-cloth was spread, decently enough, but oh! the significance of the difference!

It was not until I saw my pistol in Captain Scotton's hand that I missed it from my skirt pocket. His face was very hard and grey, his eyes fiercely hot, his mouth set in a thin line of suppressed passion. He gave me no greeting as I mounted the ladder, nor, indeed, were words spoken at all: a glance was the most that passed between any of us. Most of our men were on the poop, but a line of them, fully armed, stretched to the starboard main chains where the boat was drawn up, leaving a couple of yards of deck-space between them and the bulwarks. Along this, one by one, the mutineers were passed, a sorry crew. Hardly one but was hurt, some sorely: Harte seemed still half dazed and Floost groaned as he walked—so sorry a crew that again my heart went out in pity. They had brought the devil's bargains to a bad market, selling their souls—aye, and their bodies—for no pay.

But as the sorry procession moved forward there were no signs of softening on the faces about me, unless it was that Father Macdonald's eyes looked troubled. The rest seemed of Dave's opinion, that marooning was too good for them. In silence they climbed up, in silence climbed down, in silence boarded the boat and in silence pushed off; for a time no man rowed but the boat drifted with the tide stern-on. Blair, his hands in his lap, his shoulders rounded, sat staring up at us, scowling; and Scotton, standing by the taffrail, swinging the pistol in his hand, scowled back. It was all in silence, but no curses could have spoken louder. Remembering the man he was it was to Scotton's credit that he flung

no jeer at their misery. Presently two of them put out oars but, at a word from Blair, they only eased the boat slowly backwards, staring at us across their shoulders. Then Blair, his wizened, cursing face always turned up to us, spoke to Trant who sat beside him in the stern. For a moment Trant hesitated, but in the one instant both caught up muskets from under the after thwart and started loading rapidly. My lord threw up his hand.

"None of that, men; we spared your lives on condition—"

"Damn your conditions," answered Blair, "and if you want our lives come and take them!"

"Let them—if they dare," said Scotton under his breath, blood flooding the grey of his hard face. "Please God they do, the scum! I ask nothin' better. Oh, please God they do," and, standing behind him, I saw his shoulders heave under his hard-held passion.

And they dared. But at the flinging-up of the muskets Dave dragged me to my knees, so I saw no flash though I heard the sing of a ball overhead and the thud of another striking the rail. Though the splinters flew from within a foot of him Captain Scotton had not shifted a hair's breadth; now he spun on his heel, his small eyes round and shining.

"Stenson—Hoggett," he cried, beckoning with his hand, "round with the swivel here—put your shoulder into it! Steady, man, steady; now, you, Stenson—more! more! more yet—a touch, aye! now—" and he stooped, squat and square, staring along the sights.

"Captain Scotton," cried my lord, "it's murder—I'll not permit—"

But Scotton, still bent, pushed the pistol muzzle full in his face.

"Permit! You'll not permit? I'm master aboard the ship. An' it's no murder—it's no murder—it's justice; they broke the parole. Stand back, every man of you."

With a sweep of his hand, his eyes still on the sights, he brushed aside the iron apron covering the touch-hole, gathered up the scattered priming to a heap and snapped the pistol into it. There was a roar, a rending of timbers, a terrible screaming all in one, and as the smoke cleared Scotton straightened himself peering down and aft. Pray God I never see such a look on a man's face again.

"It's better nor Execution Dock," he said between his teeth, "and that's what it'll be for any who fetch the ship."

But no man fetched the ship—not one.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WITH THE WINDS OF GOD FOR PARADISE

THAT day, God be thanked, we cleared the Sibble Wards. With the reek of the smoke from the swivel scarcely out of our nostrils, Captain Scotton set every man his duty, and in that he was wise ; it was no time for brooding thought. With the pistol still dangling from his hand he turned.

"All hands wash down decks," he said, as if the morning watch was fresh from below, and the day's common round newly begun.

And in that order, too, he was wise. Not only was it sorrowfully necessary, but the very cleansing reminded those who lived what they had escaped from, and so hardened their pity against the final tragedy. Then the galley fires were roused and soon a meal was served, as much for the health of mind and spirit as of body—it forced upon us the common routine of life to the easing of a dangerous tension.

After that, the breeze being fitful and full of flaws because of the high rocks all about us, the remaining two boats were lowered and with the help of the ebb tide the *Regina* was towed to the mouth of the inlet ; there the foresail filled, and with the helm to larboard we headed for the north.

But slowly at first, since needs must that we say farewell to Oscroft. With what ceremony Barker

had been given to the keeping of the sea I do not know, but for Oscroft there were no maimed rights. Made ready after the manner of sailors he lay on a lashed grating in front of a gap in the lee bulwarks, the Flag of England, knotted at the corner, shrouding him in glory and honour. At his head stood Captain Scotton, the Book of the Words of Life to be spoken at Death open in his hand; on either side were my lord and Mr. Cuthbert, with the rest of us—not one absent except Hoggett at the wheel—gathered round bareheaded.

Let no man judge another until he has seen him at his best and worst; that day we saw Captain Scotton in both. But the Avenger was now the Priest, nor by any laying on of hands could a man have been more gifted with reverence and dignity. Sentence by sentence the noble words of comfort and petition fell from his lips through a silence the more profound for the soft hissing of the sea against the hull, and the rare cry of a swooping bird. Then came a change in the familiar solemnity; "we therefore commit his body to the deep," and the reading halted. Stooping, my lord and Mr. Cuthbert caught each an angle of the grating, driving it quietly forward, and with the close of the sentence into soaring hope Oscroft had been laid to such rest as his shifting grave affords the sailor; but, said Sir Humphrey Gilbert of old, "God is as near by sea as by land!" At the end there was the briefest of silence: then,

"All hands make sail," said Scotton sharply, and in an instant the pause of death broke up in the bustling stir of life. Callousness? No! The Power that gave had taken to Himself again, and the work of His world must go on.

And Shard and Bemrose? The great Mother of their lives' service has them also asleep in her keep-

ing; it is not for me, who am a sinner, to say what the waking of any shall be.

Before sunset we had dropped the Sibble Wards and next day Father Macdonald brought me some news which astonished me. If he spoke lightly it was because it was agreed that yesterday should be left decently buried in our memories and not dragged from its red grave with every word.

"Did all patient women die with Grisilda, Mistress Joan?"

"I don't love the *Regina* as I did," I answered, "but even at four knots an hour, and I think she is making that much, Whitcroft steeple will look over the shoulder of the hill before so very long."

"Don't fret," he said, "but we are not bound for Whitcroft just yet."

At that my heart went cold, as they say. "Father Macdonald, not to Los Reyos after all?"

"No, thank God, not to Los Reyos! Los Reyos?" he repeated. "Angus Macdonald would never have brought you that news, Mistress Joan. And I think when you hear you will be a new Grisilda, possessing your spirit in patience. Tollit, Sparrow and others—Plowden amongst them—are afraid of England. They say, and perhaps there is truth in it, that the law might set aside Scotton's pardon, ignore their repentance, and hang them after all. I doubt it, but," and he laughed, "Dunquester and I have no great faith in the wisdom of the law. When it is not Dogberry it is Party, and believing you will approve we have agreed to land those who wish it in Virginia."

"Virginia!" In my surprise and dismay at this lengthening of the voyage. I could do no more than echo the word.

"Virginia," he repeated and laughed again.

"Plowden, you remember, sailed from there in '83 to trade with Santa Carlos and Mercadello by way of Sierra Leone. I hope he is not as great a liar in one thing as the other, but according to Plowden the garden of Eden lies west of Point Comfort and anywhere you please on the banks of the James River. Nor do I think it is all lies: he is too circumstantial, and have we not that herb of Paradise, tobacco, by way of proof! What do you say, Captain Joan? What shall it be—Paradise or Whitcroft?"

And I, knowing little what lay before me, answered, "My paradise lies east as you know, but if men's lives and our good faith are at stake it can wait."

So it was settled, and thenceforward, partly that we might keep the past out of our thoughts but largely because, shut out from the world, there are but few things to talk of on shipboard, we spoke often of Plowden's paradise. Mostly Dave said little, but the subject had its interest for he listened keenly, dropping a curt question now and then as to the soil, the seasons, the crops, the profits of the settlers, the tenure of the land. Often, too, I saw him talk with Plowden, who was again free of the poop and took his trick at the wheel with Hoggett and the rest.

In those days Dave and I were back to our old frank comradeship of the southern voyage. The black mood of the ice-field, and the lover's passion through our time of danger were alike gone. Perhaps it was unreasonable of me to resent this last change. All on the *Regina* knew now that Dave and I were lovers—had been lovers from the first, and the need for suppression seemed to me past. The misconstruings I had once feared were no longer possible. But Dave, always cheery, always gentle and tender, held himself under strict guard, and it was not until we were well north of the Sugar Islands, the crisp air

cooling with the northern winter, and Chesapeak Bay not many days' sail distant, that I learned why.

Of the weeks spent beating north through calm or storm, or driven by the steady trades, I say nothing. Whether one or other they were weeks of peace without incident and leave no story behind them. Then came a convulsion. It was my lord who loosed it upon me while we two sat side by side, alone upon the poop.

"Joan, lass," he said breaking a long silence, abruptly, "this South Adventure of yours is going to cost Dunquester dear."

The suddenness of the attack struck me dumb. Always he had derided the greatness of the expense, always silenced me when I pressed my gratitude, my obligation: even now a touch of humour showed through the evident vexation.

"But it was never with my good-will," I began. He cut me short.

"I know, Joan," and the humour broadened. You emptied your hoard to the last farthing, the life-savings of that true gentleman, John Sharland; and being John Sharland's daughter you would pay out the last ounce of the last ingot though it left you beggared. But never since the world began could gold buy loyal and loving service, and that is where Dunquester is the poorer."

I could only shake my head, looking, no doubt, the fool I felt. "My lord, I don't understand one word of all you are saying."

At that he laughed outright, then sobered gravely.

"So Dave has told you nothing I suppose?" I shook my head again, for he went on, "The rascal! And yet he is a wise man who crosses no such bridge until he must. But he did not bind me to silence, so I'll talk on." Then having said so for a full minute

he sat silent, looking out across the white and blue of the tumbling, sun-kissed waters, seeing God knows what—Dunquester, I think, with Three Oaks and The Scuar. When he spoke his voice was very gentle. "Joan, dear lass, whether David Catlett is a great fool or a great soul I don't quite know. I suppose I am neither, or like would recognize like."

"Not a fool, great or small," said I, understanding nothing of his drift, but defending Dave.

"No," he answered, "and so I would recognize him the less. But it hurts me to the soul that there should never again be a Catlett of Three Oaks."

A thrill ran through me and somehow my throat went dry: when I spoke I hardly knew my voice.

"No Catlett at Three Oaks? What does that mean?"

His answer was oblique, but I needed no more direct explanation. "Joan, lass, shall I pitch the ingots overboard? I mean it in all seriousness. Better lose the ingots than that Dave should lose half his life moiling in Plowden's paradise till he has equalled their value. Shall I pitch them into the sea and have done with it?"

So Dave's jealousy was obstinate and here was its cure! A great soul or a fool? Something of both perhaps, for that is indeed a great greatness which has no folly in it, and knowing how passionately Dave loved me, how he had fought and striven against my obstinate will for five years, there was a true greatness in the renunciation for a time even though for a foolish reason.

"Tell me what he says, if you please."

My lord looked at me ruefully. "I am to blame in part. Because I say John Sharland was a gentleman—"

"Let that pass," I interrupted. "So is Dave,

every whit. I can settle that foolishness," and, indeed, I thought it had been settled long before.

"Then it is the ingots. There, I suppose, I am to blame too. If the devil had not ridden me that day—"

I interrupted a second time. "Let that pass too. All Whitcroft knows Dunquester of Dunquester."

"Pray God they do not!" he answered whimsically. "But I let it pass. The kernel of the nut is Catlett's pride. Until he can put down guinea for guinea he will wait."

"Aye," said I, bitterly, "And I must wait too. He forgets that."

"That brings me to what I said at the first. Let me, who brought this mischief, cure the mischief. If I throw the ingots overboard there's an end to Catlett's high-souled folly."

"No cure and no end," I answered. "I know Dave. He would say, Joan has lost this through me, I must make it good. We would be just where we are for time, and fourteen thousand poorer. What is the dear lad going to do?"

"Joan, lass," said my lord earnestly, "I do not believe there is another girl in the whole North Riding who would take it as you do."

"We are not in the North Riding, my lord, and more's the pity," I replied, still bitterly, and surely I I had reason? "If we were I think I could find means to cure Dave myself. As to taking it, as you call it, I have learned how to wait—though to be frank, I have no mind to wait, and especially for such foolishness. What does he propose to do?"

"To stay in Virginia, and perhaps in that his folly is right; there is more to be made there than at home. I am to take Three Oaks off his hands, send him the value in bills while he looks out for land, and—"

"And I am to spend my thousand a year as if there was no such thing as a plough-tail in the world, nor ever had been! The dear lad!" I sat silent a minute or two, thinking hard. "My lord, have you still some power left with him?"

"None in this thing. It's not an idea of yesterday with Dave. Macdonald and I have argued—pled—" He paused and threw up his hands as if in despair. "Nothing will move him," he ended.

"No, nothing will move him from what he believes the right. I know Dave. But apart from this have you still some influence?"

"In all directions but the one, yes."

"Then urge him, beseech him, persuade him to say nothing of this to me until the needs-must of the parting drives. Since nothing will move him, why should there be a cloud between us these last few days?"

He looked at me curiously. "But is the cloud not there already, since you know without his telling?"

"There will be no cloud if I do not choose to make one and see one," I retorted. "If Dave does not know I know where is the cloud? Persuade him, my lord."

Nor do I think poor Dave was hard to convince. When did human nature refuse the postponement of an evil day? And for him not one evil day only, but as many as lay between the telling and the *Regina's* good-bye to Plowden's paradise. He knew I was not the Patent Grisilda Father Macdonald had called me, but a woman who could and would put sore thoughts into sharp words, the sorer and sharper because it was love that thought and spoke them, since nothing can wound love like love. No! I do not think my lord found Dave hard to persuade to silence.

So these next few days passed much as the rest had passed. I was, possibly, a little lighter of heart than common, and both my lord and Father Macdonald—who, with my lord, alone knew of Dave's purpose—played up to my gaiety. But for more reasons than one I was rarely alone with Dave, but talked rather to Mr. Cuthbert, whom I found very intelligent and of a ready humour. At last he laughed so much at times that my lord grew vexed, thinking I was trying to make Dave jealous of something more dangerous to a man's peace than cold ingots. I think I have said he knew but little of women and found their twists of mind hard to follow. But when, towards the end, Captain Scotton made a third in Mr. Cuthbert's jest he must have changed his mind.

Then came the day, a bright, sharp winter's day with a sun to warm the back and an air like wine, when, with a larboard helm and Plowden conning our course we turned in between Cape Henry and Cape Charles, having first passed a great stretch of sandy beach where the breakers thundered white by the mile.

To the right was the broad mouth of Chesapeak Bay, but we held straight on, a wind of God behind us, on past the Point Comfort of Captain Smith's naming, on between sandy spits barely two miles apart and with a great rock in the middle of the channel, on into a wide, land-locked bay broken and indented like the spread fingers of a hand, where the navies of half the world might lie in safety. Round we swung to the south under a close-reefed foresail, having land behind and land to the right and left, with the James River, broad and sluggish between low banks, opening up on the starboard quarter, and with infinite caution crept up the Elizabeth River

until the town of Norfolk showed on our left; then Ezra Plowden gave the word and the anchor went down with a splash.

All this time Dave had kept to the fo'cksle, looking miserable enough, as I could see from the poop, and there he stayed until the boat was lowered. By that time he had advised Captain Scotton of his intention and to his astonished relief, met with no remonstrance. The day was still young, and those who were to quit the ship were to quit at once. Then he must needs go to his cabin, shame-faced and wretched I am sure, and then, too, it was that Mr. Cuthbert, who had been busy loading the boat while Dave was forward, became busier still.

Having sent Hal and their chest to the boat, Dave went on the poop to look for me, but was told I was at the gangway ladder. Then when I heard his voice, I called "Dave!"

Perplexed and troubled he climbed into the boat and stood over me where I sat in the stern.

"Joan," he said stammering, "Joan, what does this mean?"

"It means, Dave," and there were tears in the smiling of my eyes as I looked up into his face, "That where thou goest, I will go; and the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. Certainly no ingots shall." I paused, trembling a little, then added, "Don't you remember what you said to me in The Scaur? Where you go I go, please God."

I held my hands up to him as I spoke, for even then I was afraid of Dave's greatness of folly. But he caught them in both his, and when his eyes filled too I knew I had won: "Joan, my Joan, my dear, dear lass."

But I would not have him under any mistake.

"It is all with us, Dave, all but the ingot for Captain Scotton and the officers, and another for the men."

But he answered nothing, only took the place beside me, still holding my hands, and in silence we moved slowly away from the *Regina*. At ten yards distance I nodded to Mr. Cuthbert and the rowing ceased.

"Dave," said I, loud enough to be heard by all on board, and be sure there was not a man but was staring over the rail after us, "tell them that if they will only bide three days Mistress David Catlett will come out to bid her friends farewell—and may God bless and prosper them every one!"

Then indeed the silence broke up, and at the roar of cheers I turned and wept in Dave's arms before them all.

THE END

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This is a very readable novel in the author's best manner. Rachael Despenser, a successful artist, spends a summer holiday in a Westmoreland village, living at an old farm-house, and making friends with the villagers. Grimstone, a local baronet, is grabbing the land to make a deer run, and Rachael through championing the cause of a farmer comes into collision with him, although adored by his delicate little son. Right-of-way troubles ensue, and violence disturbs the peace. Grimstone's elder son and heir returns from Canada, where he has imbibed Radical notions. He sympathises with the villagers, and is attracted towards Rachael, whom he eventually marries. The baronet is determined to oust the farmer whom Rachael had championed, when the tragic death of his younger son leads him to relinquish the management of the estate to his heir.

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Author of "The Free Marriage," "The Plunder Pit," "Hate of Evil," etc.

Stephen Gaunt, an English sculptor famous in Italy, is the father of a son born out of wedlock of whom he has never heard. In his youth, a light attachment broken in a causeless fit of jealousy drove him abroad, but when the story opens he comes home to execute a commission, and meets his son without knowing him. In doing so, he encounters a childless couple, who have passed the boy off as their own since infancy, when his mother died. They are an elder half-brother, who has always hated Stephen, and his sensitive, tender and simple wife, who loves the boy with all her heart, fears to lose him, and yet is tormented by her secret. A romantic friendship springs up between son and father; and the chain of accidents and proofs by which he learns the truth, his struggle for control of the boy, and the effect of these events on the boy and his foster mother make a fascinating story.

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The Romance of Bayard. LIEUT.-COL. ANDREW C. P. HAGGARD, D.S.O. Author of the "The France of Joan of Arc," "Louis XI, and Charles the Bold," etc.

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The Career of Beauty Darling. DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "The Riding Master," "The Unofficial Honeymoon," etc. (7th edition).

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Author of "The Qualities of Mercy," "Cantacute Towers," etc.

Miss Adair has excelled herself in Francesca, which is a delightful story full of beautiful thoughts and idyllic touches. This author has been said to resemble the late Rosa N. Carey in possessing all the qualities which make for popularity, and the ability to arrest and maintain the reader's interest from the first page to the last.

Life's Last Gift. LOUIS DE ROBERT

With a preface by Dr. F. A. HEDGCOCK. (The book for which a committee of Parisian ladies awarded the prize of £200 for the best French novel published in 1911.)

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The beauty of this book lies in its absolute sincerity and truth. It speaks to all men and women who realise how great and terrible a possession is life.

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Author of "The Red Fleur-de-Lys," "The Destiny of Claude," etc., etc.

At the time of the French Revolution, during the siege of Carpentras by the "Brave Brigands"—the soldiers of an Irishman named Fatty—an attack is frustrated by the cleverness and courage of a young girl, who, in her adventures, mysteriously disappears. In quick succession there follow events concerning the plots and counter plots of aristocrats, papalists and revolutionaries, and amid adventures of love and war the story leads up to the famous "Glacier Massacres." It is thrilling and romantic from beginning to end.

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Gerald Carthew, a young London Barrister, whose career has hitherto been quite uneventful, suddenly finds himself involved in circumstances which leave no room for doubt that a dastardly conspiracy has been formed against his life. For some time, however, all attempts to discover the instigators of their motive are unsuccessful; and it is not until Carthew's greatest friend has fallen a victim in his stead, and he himself has been nearly lured to destruction by a beautiful American girl who has been made the innocent decoy of the conspirators, that the truth is revealed. The story, the action of which is laid in England, New York and at the Riviera, contains some thrilling moments and a most unexpected denouement.

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With a frontispiece from a painting by Edouard Detaille.

Against the vivid background of the Franco German War, there shines out, in this novel, the very human story of Pierre Lafitte, a French country lad. Other prominent figures in the story are the woman Pierre loves, her father—a fine old Colonel of Dragoons—and a German spy, not without attractive qualities, whose fate becomes entangled with theirs. The book abounds in striking situations, including the discovery and escape of the spy, the departure of the Dragoons for the war, the remorse of a French General who feels personally responsible for the men he has lost, a night in a hospital-tent, the last flicker of the defence of Paris, and the entry of the German troops. It is a remarkable book.

A Babe in Bohemia. FRANK DANBY

Author of "The Heart of a Child," "Dr. Phillips," etc., etc. (11th edition).

Frank Danby, to gain information for this novel, joined the Salvation Army, went through their training home and Refuge at Clapton, and finally became attached to the depôt of the so-called "Gutter, Slum and Garret Brigade," from which the work among the very poorest is carried out. This full length novel, having been out of print, has now been practically re-written by the author, and although the thread of the story remains, every page has been extensively revised, and it will be found to be as good as anything recently done by this popular writer.

The She-Wolf. MAXIME FORMONT

Author of "A Child of Chance," etc. Translated from the French by Elsie F. Buckley.

This is a powerful novel of the life and times of Cæsare Borgia, in which history and romance are mingled with a strong hand. The story is told of the abduction of Alva Colonna on the eve of her marriage with Propero Sarelli, when she is carried off to his palace at Rome and becomes his slave-mistress. The subsequent events, more or less following history or tradition, include the introduction of the dark woman of gipsy extraction, who enamours Cæsare, and poisons the wine by which the Colonna and her old lover Sarelli die. The story closes with a description of Cæsare's last days and death. This novel has passed through several editions in France.

The Price of Friendship. E. EVERETT-GREEN

Author of "Clive Lorimer's Marriage," "Duckworth's Diamonds," "Galbraith of Wynyates," etc., etc.

Miss Everett Green has had a remarkable output of novels in the past, but this one, her latest, is the longest—and strongest—standing to her name. It is the story of a man who impersonates his friend, from the very best of motives and plunges himself into complications and dangers. Like all of this author's tales, it finishes with a startling climax.

Called to Judgment. CORALIE STANTON AND HEATH HOSKEN. Authors of "The Muzzled Ox," "The Swelling of Jordan," etc.

One of the most thrilling stories of mystery, love and adventure which these popular collaborators have ever written. It is a vivid, human story, red-hot with incident and excitement, the central character being a man, who, after ten years' imprisonment for fraud, returns to the world with his past so effectively buried that he is known as a man of wealth, a Member of Parliament, and an Advocate for Prison Reform. The tale is said to be worthy of Poe or Gaboriau.

The Split Peas. HEADON HILL

Author of "Troubled Waters," "A Rogue in Ambush," "The Thread of Proof," etc.

The interest of this story centres in the attempt of a socialistic, time-serving Cabinet Minister, aided and abetted by a mysterious foreigner, who poses as a Soho revolutionary but is in reality a spy, to undermine the loyalty of the British Army. His efforts are frustrated by a young officer of the Guards, with the assistance of two lively Eton boys. Mr. Headon Hill is himself an old Etonian, and he has put much local colour into his book.

Captain Hawks, Master Mariner. OSWALD KENDALL

Admirers of the novels of Mr. W. W. Jacobs should read this. It is a story of three men who cannot and will not abide dulness. Though separated superficially by discipline and convention, Captain Hawks, Grummet and "Cert'nly" Wilfred are brothers "under their skins," and are controlled by the same insatiable desire for variety. Their thirst for the unexpected is amply satisfied in the search for an illusive cargo of sealskins, purchased without having been seen by Captain Hawks. That the crew are nearly drowned, frozen, starved, and smothered, proves that they succeeded in a search for a life where things happen. A capital yarn.

A Star of the East: A Story of Delhi. CHARLES E. PEARCE. Author of "The Amazing Duchess," "The Beloved Princess," "Love Besieged," "Red Revenge," etc.

This book completes the trilogy of Mr. Pearce's novels of the Indian Mutiny, of which "Love Besieged" and "Red Revenge" were the first and second. The scene is laid in Delhi, the city of all others where for the past hundred years the traditions of ancient dynasties and the barbaric splendours of the past have been slowly retreating before the ever-advancing influence of the West. The conflict of passions between Nara, the dancing girl, in whose veins runs the blood of Shah Jehan, the most famous of the Kings of Delhi, and Clare Stanhope, born and bred in English conventionality, never so pronounced as in the Fifties, is typical of the differences between the East and the West. The rivalry of love threads its way through a series of exciting incidents, culminating in the massacre and the memorable siege of Delhi.

A Gentlewoman of France. RENÉ BOYLESVE

This novel, crowned by the Academy, has had a great vogue in France, twelve editions having been sold. It is the story of a provincial girl who makes a marriage of convenience with a man who sees in her the best qualities of wifehood and motherhood. The story shows how before great temptation she stands firm and emerges chastened but conquering.

In simple, direct fashion, the sweet and most admirable wife tells her story, and it rings extraordinarily true.

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Author of "The Dean's Daughter," "The Qualities of Mercy," "Cantacute Towers," "Francesca," etc.

When General Gascoign learns that his son Gabriel has cheated at cards, he turns him out of the house and leaves him to take refuge in a beautiful West Indian Island, which had once belonged to Gabriel's mother. There the young man struggles along the thorny road of a great renunciation and a supreme self-sacrifice from Darkness into Light. A charming story.

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